

THE POEMS AND POETICS OF DYLAN THOMAS:  
THE LIFE OF HIS ART

By  
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FOR BARRY

"TO THE BEST OF MY LOVE"

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Dylan Thomas's commitment to the "imaginative life" and to its creative act is revealed both in the structure of his poems and in his poetics--his prose statements about the nature and value of poetry and about his process of poetic creation. The poetics create a context, within the poet's own framework, for a study of the poems. The poem is an embodiment and rendering of the organic process by which the poetic imagination creates. Both "craft" and "art" are essential in the poetic process. Poetry is both a "burning and crested act"--affirming life and the creative imagination's poetic process--and a "work of words," a "medium" which embodies the pattern of the formative "act." The Collected Poems are embodiments of the creative process, "celebrations" of creation in all its multiform modes. Thomas's poetics also provide a critical method of reading his poems of life--focusing on structure and "texture" and the poem's aesthetic "wholeness" and "integrity."

Of the early poems, "The Force That Through The Green Fuse" most successfully renders the imaginative perception of the creative-destructive process of existence and of the poetic creator's identification and function within it.

The contrast between the early "I See The Boys Of Summer" and the later "Fern Hill" reveals the growth of poetic vision and of the ability to embody, in unique open forms, the celebration of the imagination's creative power within life's temporal movement.

The imagination also celebrates the particular moments of birth and death, concrete milestone events in life's process. Thomas's four birthday poems not only celebrate the poet's birth but also the imagination's awakening to its creative possibilities in the context of time and death. 

Similarly, the poet's encounter with death calls not for mourning, but for celebration of the imagination's creative power to conquer death through the creation of timeless poems of "praise." Thus, the poet refuses to mourn. The creative achievement of the "death" poems--especially the ceremonious celebration of "A Refusal To Mourn"--points to the most nearly perfect achievement of the fully unified imagination--"Ceremony After A Fire Raid."

The transcendent imaginative achievement, in the movement of "Ceremony After A Fire Raid" from multiplicity to duality to unity, renders the ultimate celebration and fulfillment of the life of the poet's art and its triumph over death.

Several poems are explicitly "about" creating poems. In the earlier poems the poet is imaged as a godlike maker whose organic process of creating poems imitates nature's method of creating organic creatures. The later poems which explicitly render the poet's act image the essentially loving quality of the act of creation, and celebrate the joy and value of art, the creative and redeeming "glory" of the poems.

## CHAPTER I

### THE POETICS OF DYLAN THOMAS

Dylan Thomas praised Sir Philip Sidney's Defence of Poesie as "a defence of the imaginative life, of the duty, and the delight, of the individual poet living among men in the middle of the turning world that has, in his time, so little time for him."<sup>1</sup> Thomas's commitment and dedication to the "imaginative life" and its creative act are revealed both in the structure and image of his poems and in his prose explanations of his poetic process and goals--in letters, the "Poetic Manifesto" (1961), and the essays in Quite Early One Morning (1954). Thomas's poetics reveal his conception both of the process by which he creates poems and of the nature of the poetic result.

A study of Thomas's poetics--his discursive statements about the nature and value of poetry and his attempts to explain his experience of poetic creation---creates a context for the study of Thomas's poems which derives from the poet's own framework. And the Collected Poems can most validly and successfully be perceived in the context of Thomas's own statements of poetic theory and purpose---in the terms which he establishes, and by the critical method which he demands.

Together the poems and the poetics provide Dylan Thomas's picture of "the imaginative life"; the poetics seek to explain and analyze the poetic process which creates the poems and which the movement and "magic" of the poems embodies.<sup>2</sup> The poetics reveal Thomas's emphases and commitments as a poet--to the form, texture, pattern, and movement of his poems. And his "critical arguments"<sup>3</sup> also reveal Thomas's sense of the organic vitality of his imaginative creations--the life of his art.

Thomas's poetic theories grow out of his experience as a creator, out of his process of making poems. The letters which contain the great majority of Thomas's prose statements about poetry were written over the twenty-year period from 1932 to 1952,<sup>4</sup> during which he completed and published all of the poems in Collected Poems. Thomas, then, wrote about poetry while he was writing poems. And his poetic theories--what Thomas calls "critical arguments"--are derived from his practice of his art and craft. For Thomas, these "critical arguments" are secondary and auxiliary to the primary "poetical arguments" which, he wrote, "can only be worked out in poems."<sup>5</sup> The "critical arguments," then, provide the reader of Thomas's poems with a critical framework within which to consider the poetry itself; for, though secondary, the poetics reveal Thomas's central concerns as a poet. Although it is only in the poems that his vision and process are fully and completely embodied, the poetics reveal his explanation of his poetic

methods and goals, his conception of the relationship between the poet and his poem and between the poet and the creative process which he experiences.

The Poet's Creative Encounter with the World, Self, and Language: "Organic Reality," "Self Freedom," and "His Medium"

Dylan Thomas's descriptions of his aims as a poet create an image of the poet as a man of imagination, whose desire and function is "to put into words, never into useless, haphazard, ugly, unhappy action, the ordered turbulence, the ubiquitous and rinsing grief, the unreasonable glory, of the world I know and don't know."<sup>6</sup> Thomas seeks to create poems which render his unique, imaginative vision: "I do not want to express only what other people have felt; I want to rip something away and show what they have never seen."<sup>7</sup>

In order to achieve the imaginative power to create new poetic forms which "show what they have never seen," the poet must actively and lovingly engage himself in every aspect of the process of creation--of nature, consciousness, and his medium. He must open himself to his emotional and sensory experiences of "the ordered turbulence,"<sup>8</sup> the "organic reality,"<sup>9</sup> of the "external wonders in the world."<sup>10</sup> He must continually seek to individuate and unify his own consciousness through the ongoing processes of "introspection," "the true search for the soul"<sup>11</sup> and the consequent freeing of the imagination's creative power.



And he must encounter and revitalize his medium---giving new life to "each word,"<sup>12</sup> thus making words--in relationship with one another in the form of the poem--capable of rendering his unitive vision of "organic reality."<sup>13</sup>

In an early letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson, Thomas attempts to describe, in abstract terms, his conception of the artist's use of experience to derive his own "laws for living"; for it is this process of creating his consciousness, Thomas asserts, which is embodied by the artist "through an artistic medium":

Every thinking man--that is, every man who builds up, on a structure of tradition, the seeds of his own revolution--and every artist--that is, every man who expresses this revolution through an artistic medium--gradually forms a series of laws for living, which he may or may not adhere to. These laws are brought about slowly in the individual mind, are fostered by mental and physical experience.<sup>14</sup>

The process, then, is an ongoing and gradual one of continuing movement towards a vision of life--"laws for living"; in order to create his own sense of himself and his place in the cosmos, the poet must actively encounter and understand his experience.

In two passionate letters, written at the new year, 1934, Thomas metaphorically expresses a new-found sense of "wonder," and reveals a feeling of exaltation and discovery in the realization of creative possibility and a "knowledge of illimitability."<sup>15</sup> He "resolves" to be totally open and

available to his unique and individual "mental and physical experience" of "the literal world"; he resolves "that I shall never take things for granted, but that I shall attempt to take them as they are."<sup>16</sup> And this is a difficult task, an act of imaginative re-creation, for "Centuries of problematical progress have blinded us to the literal world; each bright and naked object is shrouded around with a thick peasoup mist of associations."<sup>17</sup> The poet thus must open his eyes to fresh and vital ways of experiencing all of the world's "objects," by stripping away their old, stale associations and seeing them as new-born. He resolves, then, to "learn . . . to say that nothing in this world is uninteresting":

How can a thing have no interest that is in this world, that has the world around it . . . . And if I can bring myself to know, not to think, that nothing is uninteresting, I can broaden my own outlook and believe once more, as I so passionately believed and so passionately want to believe, in the magic of this burning and bewildering universe, in the meaning and the power of symbols, in the miracle of myself and of all mortals, in the divinity that is so near us and so longing to be nearer, in the staggering, bloody, starry wonder of the sky I can see above and the sky I can think of below . . . . They [the stars] tell me space is endless and space curves. And I understand.<sup>18</sup>

By expanding his perceptions of "the literal world," the poet is able to expand his consciousness, to attain to a new imaginative "understanding," and to come to a realization of the infinite creative possibilities inherent in existence:

This new year has brought back to my mind the sense of magic that was lost--irretrievably, I thought--so long ago. I am conscious, if not of the probability of the impossible, at least of its possibility.<sup>19</sup>

When he imaginatively perceives and contemplates the universe, "I am filled with the terror which is the beginning of love."<sup>20</sup>

And it is this "love," born of creative perception of the cosmos, which lets him resolve to revitalize his art as well, "to forget all that I have ever written and start again, informed with a new wonder";<sup>21</sup> he thus resolves "firstly to make poetry and secondly, to write it."<sup>22</sup> For it is through love of creation that the imagination functions, as Thomas reveals in his passion "to imagine a new colour, so much whiter than white that white is black."<sup>23</sup> His "passionate" desire is always to render, in an imaginative product, the process of creation which he perceives both in the "big and magic universe"<sup>24</sup> and within himself. To make this possible, to liberate his creative powers, he determines to imaginatively experience new angles of vision, new ways of perceiving "the magic of this burning and bewildering universe":

. . . the angle of man is necessarily inconducive to the higher thoughts. Walking, as we do, at right angles with the earth, we are prevented from looking, as much as we should, at the legendary sky above us and the only-a-little-bit-more-possible ground under us. We can only (without effort) look in front of us and around us; we can look only at things that are between the earth and sky, and are much in the position of a reader of books who can

look only at the middles of pages and never (without effort) at the tops and bottoms. We see what we imagine to be a tree, but we see only a part of the tree; what the insects under the earth see when they look upwards at the tree, & what the stars see when they look downwards at the tree, is left to our imagination. And perhaps the materialist can be called the man who believes only in the part of the tree he sees, & the spiritualist a man who believes in a lot more of the tree than is within his sight. Think how much wiser we would be if it were possible for us to change our angles of perspective as regularly as we change our vests.<sup>25</sup>

The poet must also engage in the process of "becoming"--of creating a unified consciousness:

I resolve not to label the brain into separate compartments, that is, not to differentiate between what is in me that writes poetry and what is in me that says, here comes one o'clock; at this time I lunch. That is, again, a resolution not to differentiate between what is called rational and what is called irrational, but to attempt to create, or to let be created, one rationalism.<sup>26</sup>

The poet's active and loving experience of the "literal world"<sup>27</sup> and his imaginative assimilation and purification of its "bright and naked" objects from their "peasoup mist of associations"<sup>28</sup> leads him to a perception of "the symbols of the world . . . the mystery and meaning of the world . . . the fundamentals of the soul."<sup>29</sup> Clearly, "the symbols of the world" and "the fundamentals of the soul" are integrally related in Thomas's statement. And the processes by which they are sought are also related.

The "symbols of the world" are discovered through a

process of perceiving, assimilating, and integrating the "objects" and essences of "the literal world" into union with the imagination. The "fundamentals of the soul," according to Thomas, are discovered in the formative process of becoming, of individuation of the self--through introspection and unification of sensibility into "one rationalism."<sup>30</sup> He writes, for example, some "terribly practical" advice to his friend, Trevor Hughes, attempting to describe how Hughes must proceed in order to gain the ability to write:

. . . delve, deep, deep, into yourself until you find your soul, and until you know yourself. These two bits of advice aren't contradictory. The true search for the soul lies so far within the last circle of introspection that it is out of it.<sup>31</sup>

And, again: "There is only one object: the removing of veils from your soul and scabs from your body. Reaching a self freedom is the only object."<sup>32</sup> And this "self freedom" is sought in the ongoing process in which body and mind, passion and reason, "the antagonistic interplay of emotions and ideas, the rubbing together of sensibilities, brain chords and nerve chords"<sup>33</sup> are integrated.

Ultimately, the process by which this "self freedom" is sought is embodied in an artifact. Thomas advises Hughes first to introspect and seek "self freedom" and then to "Write . . . about yourself searching for your soul amid the horrors of corruption and disease, about your passionate strivings after something you don't know and can't

express. (This is one of the few ways of knowing it and expressing it.)"<sup>34</sup>

The introspective process of "becoming" which Thomas describes is motivated in large part by "the great need of forever striving after this mystery and meaning."<sup>35</sup> Not only must the poet submit to his impressions of "the literal world," he must "let the inner consciousness . . . develop"<sup>36</sup>--partly by "loosening your mind."<sup>37</sup> He must "delve, deep . . . into yourself,"<sup>38</sup> seeking to reach his "self freedom"; he must constantly engage in the processes of creating himself and his world anew, or integrating his senses, passions, intellect, and imagination in order to continually free his creative powers and become enabled to "make poetry," new forms which embody both his experience and perception of his relatedness to "the literal world" and to his process of self-creation---he must "dream" his "genesis."<sup>39</sup>

These two interdependent processes--by which the poet places himself in an organic, creative relationship to both self and the external world--lead his unifying and creative imagination to a perception and vision of the unity, wholeness, and identity of all existence in terms of the organic process by which everything grows and lives; and this leads him to a desire to embody this truth in works of art:

It is my aim as an artist . . . to bring these wonders ["the external wonders in the world"] into myself, to prove beyond doubt to myself that the

flesh that covers me is the flesh that covers  
the sun, that the blood in my lungs is the blood  
that goes up and down in a tree.<sup>40</sup>

And the poet seeks to embody this unitive vision of the  
cosmos in the image of his poems:

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower  
Drives my green age . . . .<sup>41</sup>

It was Thomas's conviction that "Perhaps the greatest  
works of art are those that reconcile, perfectly, inner and  
outer"<sup>42</sup> worlds, the "wonders" of the external world with  
the "inner splendour"<sup>43</sup> of the creative self. And it was  
his "aim as an artist" to achieve this "reconciliation":  
"seeking kinship,' with everything . . . is exactly what  
I do do."<sup>44</sup>

Related to the poet's search for "self freedom" and  
his active encounter with "the external wonders in the  
world"<sup>45</sup> is the "inner necessity for expression and the  
medium of expression,"<sup>46</sup> for a new mode of rendering these  
processes through which the poet creates himself and his  
world and is thus empowered to create his poems. Not only  
must he "have something to say," he must also find "the  
vocabulary to say it with."<sup>47</sup> The process of integration  
and assimilation of experience, and the parallel process of  
individuation and unification of the self through intro-  
spection, are thus valued for their role in the service of  
poetic creation. For the process of poetic creation moves  
towards a union of self, experience, and the creative  
imagination.

The poet "is his medium first, & expresses out of his medium what he sees, hears, thinks, & imagines";<sup>48</sup> through his medium he embodies the reality of the experiences of his perceiving senses, his distinguishing intellect, and his unifying imagination. The poet must discover and create new ways of encountering and using his medium; he must actively discover the essence of the medium--"I've got to get nearer to the bones of words."<sup>49</sup> And he must revitalize his language and "make it new" for himself in his ongoing movement "towards the final intensity of language: the words behind words":<sup>50</sup>

No single word in all our poetical vocabulary is a virgin word, ready for our first love, willing to be what we make it . . . . All we need do is to rid our minds of the humbug of words, to scorn the prearranged leaping together of words, to make by our own judicious and, let it be prayed for, artistic selection, new associations for each word. Each word should be a basin for us to cough our individual diseases into, and not a vessel full already of others' and past diseases for us to play with as a juggler plays with puddings.<sup>51</sup>

It is part of a poet's job to take a debauched and prostituted word . . . and to smooth away the lines of its dissipation, and to put it on the market again fresh and virgin.<sup>52</sup>

According to Thomas's metaphoric expression, it is love for words and expression which motivates the poet to seek to create "new associations for each word"--even as he does for the "objects" of the world--and thus return it, "virgin," to his own "poetical vocabulary." Thomas's "Poetic Manifesto" further elucidates his motivating love for words:



I wanted to write poetry in the beginning  
 because I had fallen in love with words . . . .  
 I fell in love--that is the only expression  
 I can think of--at once, and am still at  
 the mercy of words . . . . I tumbled for  
 words at once.<sup>53</sup>

Experience which is assimilated and transformed in the creative process can thus be embodied through the medium of words, which have been recreated "ready for our first love."<sup>54</sup> Through this imaginative process of recreation, the poet regains his first "time of innocence" with language:

That was the time of innocence; words burst upon me unencumbered by trivial or portentous association; words were their spring-like selves, fresh with Eden's dew, as they flew out of the air. They made their own original associations as they sprang and shone.<sup>55</sup>

Using another organic metaphor, Thomas describes the poet's relationship with his medium, and elaborates his statement that the poet "expresses out of his medium," rather than moving "towards words as the most suitable medium through which to express" his experiences:<sup>56</sup>

I think it [poetry] should work from words from the substance of words and the rhythm of substantial words set together, not towards words. Poetry is a medium, not a stigmata on paper. Men should be two-tooled, and a poet's middle leg is his pencil. If his phallic pencil turns into an electric drill, breaking up the tar and the concrete of language worn thin by the tricycle tyres of nature poets and the heavy six wheels of the academic sirs, so much the better.<sup>57</sup>

Much of the poet's "necessity," then, is to revitalize and transform language, as he does experience, by "fresh imagining,"<sup>58</sup> and thus to make words living, fresh, and "virgin," capable of embodying the experience and truth of the living imagination.

The Poet's Responsibility: "A Person of Words in Action"

The artist is not, according to Thomas, a "man of action,"<sup>59</sup> but "a person of words in action,"<sup>60</sup> a man of imagination who renders "organic reality" "by the magic of words and images."<sup>61</sup> The poet is not limited or guided by a need to express, describe, or justify political or social ideologies; he is limited only by his perception and experience of "organic reality," by the creative process through which he integrates his experiences into his consciousness and imaginatively transforms them, and by the organic form of his art:

There is no necessity for the artist to do anything. There is no necessity. He is a law unto himself, and his greatness or smallness rises or falls by that. He has only one limitation, and that is the widest of all. The limitation of form. Poetry finds its own form; form should never be superimposed. The structure should rise out of the words and the expression of them.<sup>62</sup>



Poetry's uniqueness and significance derives from its form and image.

The poet's responsibility is to his art; his duty and function are to render the truth of the imagination's life

in new forms. Thomas declares this conviction unequivocally in his comments on the relationship between war and poetry:

When you come to talk about one's duty as a writer, then one can only say that his duty is to write. If to undergo contemporary reality to its most extreme is to join in a war--the evil of which is the war itself and not the things it is supposed, wrongly, to be attempting to exterminate--against people you do not know, and probably be killed or maimed, then one can only say flip-pantly that the best poems about death were always written when the poets were alive, that Lorca didn't have to be gored before writing a bullsong, that for a writer to undergo the utmost reality of poverty is for him to starve to death and therefore to be, as a writer, useless.<sup>63</sup>

Thomas further asserts that "capital-lettered War can only in subject matter affect poetry," and that:

War can't produce poetry, only poets can, and war can't produce poets either because they bring themselves up in such a war that this outward bang, bang of men against men is something they have passed a long time ago on their poems' way towards peace.<sup>64</sup>

A poet is totally committed to the poetic process of creation in which he is involved and so he cannot, as a poet, involve himself in any war other than his own "warring work on words"; "when he is fighting, he is not a poet."<sup>65</sup> He is only a poet when he is vitally and completely engaged in the process of rendering the reality and truth of the imagination's life through the medium of words:

A poet writing a poem is at peace with everything except words, which are eternal actions; only in the lulls between the warring work on words can

he be at war with men . . . . As he writes good poetry very rarely, he is most often at peace with the eternal actions of words and is therefore very likely to be caught up in any bang bang that is going.

What is a poet anyway? He is a man who has written or is writing what he, in his utmost human fallible integrity, necessarily communal, believes to be good poetry.<sup>66</sup>

The poet's crucial battle is with words and self; the war is with the medium--to recreate it in such a way that it can render the imaginative vision, can "hold" the form which the imagination creates. Words "are eternal actions" in which the poet must be actively involved in order to render the "truth I must try to reach & realise."<sup>67</sup>

#### The Poetic Process: The Creation of "Life"

The processes described in the preceding pages are aspects of a single process which unifies the consciousness and liberates the powers of the imagination, enabling it to "make poetry," first by transforming and recreating the experience of the organic wholeness of the self and its identity with the "organic reality" of the cosmos, and then by rendering this vision in new, living forms. Each poem renders, "by the magic of words and images," this organic process by which the poet has become enabled to create it. Each poem is the product of this process of assimilation and re-creation as well as a part of the ongoing movement towards reaching and realising in concrete, individuated objects, the "dimly-realised truth"<sup>68</sup> of its unitive vision.

"All poetical impulses are towards the creation of adventure. And adventure is movement. And the end of each adventure is a new impulse to move again towards creation."<sup>69</sup> Thomas also explains the vital relationship between the individual poem and poetic creation in terms of process and product, "enquiry" and "result," again emphasizing "movement":


Very much of my poetry is, I know, an enquiry and a terror of fearful expectation, a discovery and facing of fear. I hold a beast, an angel and a madman in me, and my enquiry is as to their working, and my problem is their subjugation and victory, downthrow and upheaval, and my effort is their self-expression. The new poem I enclose, "How Shall My Animal," is a detailed enquiry; and the poem too is the result of the enquiry, and is the furthest I can, at present, reach or hope for. The poem is, as all poems are, its own question and answer, its own contradiction, its own agreement.<sup>70</sup>

"How Shall My Animal" is an "enquiry" into the nature of the process of poetic creation, in which the "enquiry"--into the self and its imaginative powers of "creative destruction, destructive creation"<sup>71</sup>--is embodied in poetic form. The poem renders the search, the discovery, and the partial "truth" which has been achieved.

This passage reveals the central concerns of Thomas's poetics: The nature of the creative process and of the poem which is its product, or "result." The poetic process is integrally related to the creative experience of the world, the unification of consciousness, and the resultant liberation of the imagination; for this is the organic

process of growth which the imagination embodies in poems. The poetic product, then, renders process and movement; "Poetry is the rhythmic, inevitably narrative, movement from an overclothed blindness to a naked vision."<sup>72</sup>

Thomas also tries to explain the process or "method," as he calls it, by which the truth of the imagination is transformed into the "words and images" of a new form. In an often-quoted letter to Henry Treece, Thomas uses an organic metaphor to describe the method by which a poem is created, the role of "intellectual and critical forces" in this process, and the relationship between the poet and his poem:



. . . . when you say that I have not Cameron's or Madge's "concentric movement round a central image" you are not accounting for the fact that it consciously is not my method to move concentrically round a central image. A poem by Cameron needs no more than one image; it moves around one idea, from one logical point to another, making a full circle. A poem by myself needs a host of images because its centre is a host of images. I make one image--though "make" is not the word, I let, perhaps, an image be "made" emotionally in me and then apply to it what intellectual and critical forces I possess--let it breed another, let that image contradict the first, make of the third image bred out of the other two together, a fourth contradictory image, and let them all, within my imposed formal limits, conflict. Each image holds within it, the seeds of its own destruction, and my dialectical method, as I understand it, is a constant building up and breaking down of the images that come out of the central seed, which is itself destructive and constructive at the same time.

Reading back over that, I agree it looks preciously like nonsense. To say that I "let" my images breed and conflict is to deny my

critical part in the business. But what I want to try to explain--and it's necessarily vague to me--is that the life in any poem of mine cannot move concentrically round a central image; the life must come out of the centre: an image must be born and die in another; and any sequence of my images must be a sequence of creations, recreations, destructions, contradictions. I cannot either, as Cameron does, and as others do--and this primarily explains his and their writing round the central image--make a poem out of a single motivating experience. I believe in the single thread of action through a poem, but that is an intellectual thing aimed at lucidity through narrative. My object is, as you say, conventionally to "get things straight." Out of the inevitable conflict of images--inevitable because of the creative, recreative, destructive and contradictory nature of the motivating centre, the womb of war--I try to make that momentary peace which is a poem. I do not want a poem of mine to be, nor can it be, a circular piece of experience placed neatly outside the living stream of time from which it came; a poem of mine is, or should be, a watertight section of the stream that is flowing all ways, all warring images within it should be reconciled for that small stop of time. I agree that each of my earlier poems might appear to constitute a section from one long poem; that is because I was not successful in making a momentary peace with my images at the correct moment; images were left dangling over the formal limits, and dragged the poem into another; the warring stream ran on over the insecure barriers the fullstop armistice was pulled and twisted raggedly on into a conflicting series of dots and dashes.<sup>73</sup>

It is clear from Thomas's metaphoric description of his method of writing poetry that he conceives of the creative process as an organic one which itself is identified with the organic processes of life--his emphasis is on "the life in any poem of mine." He thus explains the poetic process in organic metaphors, which both describe



and image his creative method as an active process of creating "life." The rhythm and pattern of creation of the poem is implicitly identified with the sexual rhythm of life; the images "breed," grow, and die--"an image must be born and die in another." And the process of making poetry out of the "inevitable conflict" of "warring images," which grow out of "the central seed" in "the womb of war," also renders the essentially creative-destructive, conflicting nature of life's process--"the creative, recreative, destructive and contradictory nature" of birth, growth, death, and rebirth. Thus, "any sequence of my images must be a sequence of creations, recreations, destructions, contradictions," a sequence which parallels the creative-destructive-recreative "sequence" of life.

One point of emphasis throughout this passage, then, is on the poetic process as an ongoing process of growth, conflict, and reconciliation. The method which creates the poem is identical to the process by which all life is created. Thomas's "dialectical method" is thus the poet's version of life's organic method--"a constant building up and breaking down of the images that come out of the central seed, which is itself destructive and constructive at the same time."

The goal of this "dialectical method," of the "inevitable conflict," is reconciliation of the opposing and "warring images" in "that momentary peace which is a



poem." Thus, the poetic process also images--through the reconciliation of images and the attempt to achieve the "momentary peace" of a completed poem--the process of self-creation through interaction of conflicting psychic functions--perception, emotion, reason, and imagination. And reconciliation also images the imagination's unitive vision of the identity of all creation; this poetic pattern of conflict and reconciliation is the pattern of all existence. Through the integration of images the poet reveals the possibilities of existence, of attaining the unity which grows out of diversity.

In the process of making a poem, then, the creative imagination identifies with the creative process of life; and ultimately, the "conflicting images" are reconciled as the imagination identifies with all and is thus able to integrate the contraries into a unitive vision. This pattern is paralleled both in the structure and movement of the poem and in the poetic process by which the poet "lets" the images move towards "that momentary peace which is a poem."

By contrasting his own imaginative method with the intellectual method of Norman Cameron, Thomas also reveals his sense of the primary role of the imagination in the poetic process; he contends that he builds a poem from an imaginative basis--"a host of images"--rather than from a rational premise--"one idea." Unlike Cameron--who begins

with a single idea, a "single motivating experience," and "moves around one idea, from one logical point to another, making a full circle"--Thomas begins with an image and "let[s] it breed another" and another until he has made "a host of images" which is the "motivating centre" of the growing poem. The growth of Thomas's poem is not a "logical" development from a single idea, as is Cameron's, but an organic movement in which the images breed and grow and die. The logic is thus the organic, unifying "logic" of the imagination rather than the mechanical, discriminating logic of the intellect; it is a logic of images rather than of ideas.

The imagination's function is to perceive identity, to unify, and to create a living reality; out of contradiction and conflict, the tension of creation and destruction, the imagination creates reconciliation and unity, the wholeness of the completed form--the "momentary peace which is a poem." The imagination creates by making images; and the process of making images is what Thomas calls "the motivating centre" of the poem. The "host of images" is this "central seed" from which the poem grows. Thomas thus makes clear in this passage that the image-making function is the central one in his method of creating poetry. In an earlier statement, Thomas asserts that the poem begins with the making, or "selecting" of images rather than with ideas; he tells Pamela Hansford Johnson:

I prefer you . . . when you have no guiding thought behind you, but rather when you are in the process of selection--selecting your images to suit your particular moods, selecting your thoughts to fit those images.<sup>74</sup>

The "process of selection" is, thus, an imaginative one, for the process occurs without a "guiding thought" or intellectual decision. But the intellect is far from insignificant in the poetic process: "I make one image . . . and then apply to it what intellectual and critical forces I possess."<sup>75</sup>

The intellectual, rational mode of thought, then, performs a secondary, but crucial, function in the making of a poem. The "intellectual and critical forces" enter the process after the imagination has created the image; and the intellectual forces "make comprehensible" the form and image which have been "'made' emotionally." It is an integral element of the poet's art to render the imagination's truth through the medium of words. The intellectual power thus enables the imagination to render its process and vision, its own organic form, in the most effective verbal form--"to write" poetry; the function of the intellect is always to serve the "imaginative purpose":

One of the arts of the poet is to make comprehensible and articulate what might emerge from subconscious sources; one of the great main uses of the intellect is to select from the amorphous mass of subconscious images, those that will best further his imaginative purpose.<sup>76</sup>

Craft and Art

Thomas thus distinguishes between the imaginative, or image-making, power and the intellectual power, always conscious of the necessity of both in achieving his "imaginative purpose, which is to write the best poem he can."<sup>77</sup> And it is significant that Thomas often associates the poet's "art" with the primary imaginative function while he identifies "craft" with "the intellectual and critical forces." He makes the distinction between the poet's "art" and his "craft," for example, in terms of the limitations of poverty:

The impulse of a poet is not affected by  
hunger and squalor, but the "craft" needs  
time and concentration which a man nagged  
by hunger cannot afford to give it.<sup>78</sup>

The "craft" is the technical, prosodical, intellectual process by which the words and images are ordered so as to render, in the total form of the poem, the organic process by which the poet's imagination creates. Both "craft" and "art" are essential. The creative "impulse of the poet" must be made "comprehensible" through the intellectual discipline of his craftsmanship; in response to the question "Do you wait for a spontaneous impulse before writing a poem?" Thomas answered "No." He continued his answer with an assertion of the importance of craftsmanship and of the crucial interrelationship between "craft" and "the poetical 'impulse'":

The writing of a poem is, to me, the physical and mental task of constructing a formally watertight compartment of words, preferably with a main moving column (i.e., narrative) to hold a little of the real causes and forces of the creative brain and body. The causes and forces are always there, and always need a concrete expression. To me, the poetical "impulse" or "inspiration" is only the sudden, and generally physical, coming of energy to the constructional, craftsman ability. The laziest workman receives the fewest impulses. And vice versa.<sup>79</sup>

Thomas's advice to Pamela Hansford Johnson further reveals this conception of the relationship between the imaginative and intellectual functions and the necessity of the latter for the perfection of the poem:

The talent . . . is not enough by itself; the work-woman in your poetess, the intellectual, the thinking craftswoman, has not had half enough to do. You must work at the talent as a sculptor works at stone, chiselling, plotting, rounding, edging & making perfect.<sup>80</sup>

In a letter to Vernon Watkins, Thomas responds to Watkins' criticism of one of his poems by indicating that the poem accurately renders the experience and feeling; but he acknowledges that it may not be "poetically effective,"<sup>81</sup> as well. The personal response to experience must be made "poetically effective" by the imaginative process of transformation of experience into image and form. And the poet's intellectual and critical powers must make "the mechanical preparations for that (in a way) accidental rush" of "verse."<sup>82</sup> The poet's "craft" thus

enables him to order "the fallible creative rush of verse"<sup>83</sup> and to make it "poetically effective." That Thomas places a high value on craftsmanship is clear not only from his advice to Pamela Hansford Johnson, but also from his description of himself:

I am a painstaking conscientious, involved and  
devious craftsman in words.<sup>84</sup>

What I like to do is to treat words as a  
craftsman does his wood or stone or what-  
have-you.<sup>85</sup>

Thomas further reveals the value of craftsmanship in his severe criticism of the Surrealists for their lack of "craft," their refusal of the conscious intellectual control which makes the imaginative creation a poem rather than a collection of unstructured archetypal images:

I do not mind from where the images of a poem  
are dragged up; drag them up, if you like,  
from the nethermost sea of the hidden self;  
but, before they reach paper, they must go  
through all the rational processes of the  
intellect. The Surrealists, on the other  
hand, put their words down together on paper  
exactly as they emerge from chaos; they do  
not shape these words or put them in order;  
to them, chaos is the shape and order. This  
seems to me to be exceedingly presumptuous;  
the Surrealists imagine that whatever they  
dredge from their subconscious selves and  
put down in paint or in words must, essentially,  
be of some interest or value. I deny this.<sup>86</sup>

The poem only attains "interest or value" when it is made "poetically effective" as well as personally effective, when "the value . . . the integrity . . . the wholeness" of its unitive vision<sup>87</sup> are embodied in a carefully

"worked-out, if not a premeditated-in-detail, whole,"<sup>88</sup> in which the imaginative "logic of my poem" dictates both its structure and the goal which the craftsmanship must achieve. Watkins is thus criticized for suggesting changes "for purely musical motives." Thomas is always conscious of the "wholeness" of the poetic process and its product, and of the close relationship between "craft" and "art"; thus, "musical motives" are inadequate. The craft--the intellectual and critical modes--function in the service of the "art"--the imagination's creation of "value" in a unique, vital, whole form:

I think you are liable, in your criticisms of me, to under-rate the value--or, rather, the integrity, the wholeness--of what I am saying or trying to make clear that I am saying, and often to suggest alterations or amendments for purely musical motives. For instance, "Caught in a somersault of tumbled mantime" may (and I doubt it) sound more agreeable--we'll leave out any suggestion of it sounding inevitable because it is, however good the implied criticism, a group of words outside the poem--to the "propheying ear" than "In an imagining of tumbled mantime," a line I worked out for its sounds & not in spite of them. My criticism of your critical suggestion in this case is that your "ear" is deaf to the logic of my poem;

"Caught in a somersault etc etc  
Suddenly cold as fish"

is an ambiguous tangle, very like nonsense . . . but the suggestion still does, I believe, show the way your criticism often works: towards the aural betterment . . . of details, without regard for their significance in a worked-out, if not a premeditated-in-detail, whole. This is certainly one critical way, but when it suggests "withered" for "sheeted" in the last line but one of the first stanza, I suggest it cuts across the poem and does not come out of it.<sup>89</sup>

The "details" which the craftsman refines and orders grows out of the "whole," total form of the poem, and cannot be intellectually contrived or altered except in the context of the organic process by which the "whole" is created.

Thomas's actual method of composition is described by Vernon Watkins as the craftsman's careful mode of reproducing the imagination's creative process; he begins with form and texture, out of which the image is created--and the poem is made by a process of growth, or "building":

Dylan worked upon a symmetrical abstract with tactile delicacy; out of a lump of texture or nest of phrases [or "host of images"] he created music, testing everything by physical feeling, working from the concrete image outwards.<sup>90</sup>

He was a slow and patient craftsman . . . . His method of composition was itself painfully slow. He used separate work-sheets for individual lines, sometimes a page or two being devoted to a single line, while the poem was gradually built up, phrase by phrase. He usually had beforehand an exact conception of the poem's length, and he would decide how many lines to allot to each part of its development.<sup>91</sup>

In response to an attack on the craftsmanship of his poetry, Thomas vehemently asserts that "he is wrong, I swear it. My facility, as he calls it, is, in reality, tremendously hard work."<sup>92</sup> In a review, according to Thomas, Stephen Spender wrote that "The truth is that Thomas's poetry is turned on like a tap; it is just poetic stuff with no beginning nor end, shape or intelligent and intelligible control."<sup>93</sup> Thomas refutes this statement and reveals that poetry, for him, clearly is not a "spontaneous



overflow of powerful feelings," any more than it was for Wordsworth. It is, rather, created by a process in which both imaginative vision and organic process, as well as intellectual discipline and "tremendously hard work," are essential.<sup>94</sup> In this reply to Spender's criticism, he describes his poetry as "hewn" into shape:

Spender's remark is really the opposite of what is true. My poems are formed; they are not turned on like a tap at all; they are "watertight compartments." Much of the obscurity is due to rigorous compression; the last thing they do is to flow; they are much rather hewn.<sup>95</sup>

The use of "hewn" recalls Thomas's declaration that:

What I like to do is to treat words as a craftsman does his wood or stone or what-have-you, to hew, carve, mould, coil, polish & plane them into patterns, sequences, sculptures, fugues of sound expressing some lyrical impulse, some spiritual doubt or conviction, some dimly-realised truth I must try to reach and realise.<sup>96</sup>

And it is also reminiscent of his advice to Pamela Hansford Johnson, in which he also makes the analogy between the poetic craftsman and the sculptor: "You must work at the talent as a sculptor works at stone,"<sup>97</sup> making poems which are "hewn." In such poems, the intellectual powers have refined, polished, and ordered the imaginative materials into a form which renders and embodies the organic process of their creation while at the same time revealing the conscious intellectual control of the craftsman. As Thomas states in the "centre of images" passage, the images

in his poems conflict "within my imposed formal limits."<sup>98</sup>

Thomas's description of his method of poetic creation in the "centre of images" passage, recalls and clarifies his earlier statement that "Poetry finds its own form; form should never be superimposed."<sup>99</sup> The poem's form is organic; its "structure should rise out of the words and the expression of them"<sup>100</sup> and out of the imaginative process of creation. The emphasis is, then, on the "medium" rather than on the "message"; form and image take precedence over theme and meaning, and in fact, render theme and meaning. The uniqueness, individuality, and originality of the poet's creation consist in the new form through which he creates new life, not in original or new ideas. The medium is the message. Thomas thus praises Oscar Williams's poems, not for their value as expressions of ideas, but for their vitality and exuberance--their life--and, clearly, for the individuality and originality of their organic--rather than superimposed--form:

The poems . . . conduct their prolific unpretty lives in front of the nose of your nerves. They are pieces that fly, hot and violent and exuberantly unhappy, off a poem in the making. The wheels go round, crying, protesting, denying, on rails that are laid out only as the wheels express towards them. The rules, the form, spring up urgently as the temper of making needs them.<sup>101</sup>

The poetry, then, "finds its own form";<sup>102</sup> and Thomas's reaction to poetry which does not find its own form, which is structured from a mechanical rather than an organic

premise, is negative and often angry. He attacks E.E. Cummings and his followers, for example, because they are "obsessed by the idea of form," and thus "chop up their poems into little strips and pin them horizontally, diagonally & upside-down on the pages," (*italics mine*).<sup>103</sup>

Thomas's frequent discussion of form and structure reveals that he too is "obsessed" by form--but not by the "idea of form"; rather, his obsession is with the poet's "necessity" to make his poems living forms in which every aspect---shape and length, word and image--grows out of the total imaginative basis and serves the "imaginative purpose" of the poem. "There is no necessity for the artist to do anything"; his only function is to create, and "he has only one limitation, and that is the widest of all: the limitation of form."<sup>104</sup>

The poet as craftsman must utilize all the "tricks" of prosody, all the "technical paraphernalia" [sic] in order to most successfully embody, in the form of his poems, the truth of the imagination's unitive vision and the vitality of its organic process of growth and creation:

I use everything & anything to make my poems work and move in the direction I want them to: old tricks, new tricks, puns, portmanteau-words, paradox, allusion, paronomasia, paragram, catachresis, slang, assonantal rhymes, vowel rhymes, sprung rhythm. Every device there is in the language is there to be used if you will.<sup>105</sup>



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Thomas further reveals the necessity of "technical paraphenalia"[sic] in his attack on "formlessness" in the poetry of his contemporaries; he states that their "formlessness is the outcome of entire prosodaical incompetence."<sup>106</sup> And he praises Pamela Hansford Johnson for her "grasp of form and . . . handling of metre."<sup>107</sup>

Throughout his correspondence Thomas speaks of form in two contexts. The total form, which is the poem, is organic and grows out of the imaginative process of creation; and this organic form is rendered and made "comprehensible" through the poet's craft--his creation of "formal limits." Thus, Watkins's description of Thomas's "method of composition" serves as a corollary to Thomas's own description of his poetic process. Thomas attempts to render metaphorically the imaginative process by which he "make[s] poetry," while Watkins pictures the craftsman at work, describing the method by which he "write[s] it."<sup>108</sup>

The Poem: A "Burning and Crested Act" and A "Work of Words"

It is nevertheless clear from many of Thomas's statements that he finds it difficult to describe in discursive prose the imaginative process by which he makes his poems. In the "centre of images" passage, as he notes in the second paragraph, he implies that the poem forms without the conscious control--both imaginative and intellectual--of the poet: "To say that I 'let' my images breed and conflict is to deny my critical part in the business."<sup>109</sup>

The difficulty in expression resides in the very nature of the attempt, for the poet gives form and life to his poems by "letting" them grow imaginatively, and the image-making function cannot be rationally explained by the poet. Yet Thomas insists, in response to a critical statement from Vernon Watkins, that the "forming" poem is never independent of the poet:

And, yes the poem did appear to tire of itself at the end--: (by the way, I resent that "tire of itself" idea, which arrogantly supposes the self-contained identity of the poem even in its forming phases; the poem is not, of course, itself until the poet has left it.)<sup>110</sup>


The poet gives life to his creation, then, and the poem becomes, paradoxically, "itself"--independent of its maker, with a "self-contained identity," a life of its own:

The aim of a poem is the mark that the poem itself makes: it's the bullet and the bull's-eye; the knife, the growth, and the patient. A poem moves only towards its own end, which is the last line. Anything further than that is the problematical stuff of poetry, not of the poem. That's my one critical argument, if it can be called that; the rest is a poetical argument, and can only be worked out in poems.<sup>111</sup>

Each poem is both "a detailed enquiry . . . and . . . the result of the enquiry";<sup>112</sup> it is the product of the poetic process and an image of that process. It is a whole, self-contained unit of life, "a watertight section" of the "living stream of time."<sup>113</sup>

Poetry is also both "a burning and crested act"<sup>114</sup> and a "work of words,"<sup>115</sup> a structure of words and images which renders the creative, unitive "act" of the creative imagination. Thomas's correspondence and public statements are filled with attempts to define and describe the essential qualities and characteristics of poetry; and a study of these critical attempts reveals a definition of poetry which distinguishes between "act" and "work," art and craft, process and product, while it emphasizes their wholeness and unity as imaged and conveyed in the poem's structure.

The craftsman describes poetry as a "work of words,"<sup>116</sup> a "medium"<sup>117</sup> through the structure of which the pattern of the formative, life-giving "act" is rendered; and because poetry is a "work of words," a verbal medium, it consists of words in relationships. But words tend to be static, fixed, and unchanging; they are an intellectual medium and therefore inherently possess "sense" and meaning, unlike paint, stone, or musical notes. They are thus more limiting in terms of imaginative productions than are other media; in 1934 Thomas speaks of "my knowledge of their inadequacy." Yet he also reaffirms his commitment to the "wordy" existence, despite its inherent difficulties: "There must be only half a world tangible, audible, & visible to the illiterate";<sup>118</sup> though words may often be "inadequate," they can still create a world. In order to create a living form in words the poet must, as part of the



poetic process, revitalize and recreate his words, dealing with them "as a craftsman does his wood or stone,"<sup>119</sup> reshaping and renewing them and rendering them more expressive. Each word must be "valued according to its individual life";<sup>120</sup> only then can words be living, concrete realities and thus exist in active, vital relationships within a poem. Poetry "should work from words from the substance of words and the rhythm of substantial words set together . . . . Poetry is a medium,"<sup>121</sup> then, in which words exist in relationship.

Thomas perceives words as the raw material which the poet-as-craftsman can "hew, carve, mould, coil, polish & plane . . . into patterns, sequences, sculptures, fugues of sound,"<sup>122</sup> which can image the process and pattern of creation in a living form. Words are, for Thomas, concrete entities--objects with shape, texture, colour, and sound as well as meaning:

You must endeavour to feel and weigh the shape, sound, content of each word in relation to the shape, sound, content etcetera of the words surrounding it. It isn't only the meaning of the words that must develop harmonically, each syllable adding to the single existence of the next, but it is that which also informs the words with their own particular life: the noise, that is, that they make in the air and ear, the contours in which they lie on the page and the mind, their colours and density.<sup>123</sup>

The poet must, then, perceive words as forms rather than as vehicles of expression. In an earlier letter, Thomas praised Lawrence Durrell's "Stygian prose," which he

admired because of the active vitality of the language:

You use words like stones, throwing, rockerying, mossing, churning, sharpening, bloodsucking, melting, and a hard firewater flows and rolls through them all the time.<sup>124</sup>

And he praised two of the poems sent him by an unknown poet "because the words are objects" and the poems thus "make an immediate impact."<sup>125</sup> Thomas's insistence that words be valued as "objects" or forms with real, physical life leads him to deemphasize meaning, though not to dismiss it--he disliked Gertrude Stein's repetition of "simplicities over and over again in intricate and abstract patterns so that the meaning shall be lost and only the bare and beautiful shells of the words remain."<sup>126</sup> Rather, Thomas demands that his poems, and the revitalized words with which they are made, be taken "literally, that is rid of all their [external] associations";<sup>127</sup> "I ask only that my poetry should be taken literally."<sup>128</sup>

By "taken literally," Thomas means that the poem must be encountered on its own terms, as a total individuated form which can be apprehended only in the context of its own life. The poem thus lives its own life, as he said of Oscar Williams's poems, and must be perceived only in terms of the associations and relationships which it establishes. Externally derived meanings---such as Dame Edith Sitwell's interpretation of "an atlas-eater with a jaw for news" which Thomas attacked because it was not a literal rendering



of the lines in the context of the poem<sup>129</sup>--are irrelevant to the experience and reality of the poem. Meaning--of individual words as well as poems--Thomas insists, is less important, to both poet and reader, than the texture, shape, and sound--the structure--of words in relationship: "I'm never very hot on meaning. It's the sound of meaning that I like."<sup>130</sup> Thomas does, in fact, quote Eliot on the uses of meaning in a poem:

Remember Eliot. "The chief use of the 'meaning' of a poem, in the ordinary sense, may be to satisfy one habit of the reader, to keep his mind diverted and quiet, while the poem does its work upon him."<sup>131</sup>

The poem "does its work" on the reader's imagination through form and image, the texture and rhythm of "substantial words set together";<sup>132</sup> these are the concerns of the worker in words:

The meaning of a poem you cannot, as a poet, talk about in any way constructively: that must be left to theoreticians, logicians, philosophers, sentimentalists, etc. It is only the texture of a poem that can be discussed at all. Nobody, I think, wants to talk, either, about how a poem feels to him; he finds it emotionally moving or he doesn't; and, if he does, there's nothing to discuss except the means, the words themselves, by which this emotional feeling was aroused.<sup>133</sup>

The "words themselves" are the "stuff" of poetry; the structure of words in "patterns, sequences, sculptures, fugues of sound,"<sup>134</sup> is what renders the feeling and experience of the poem. The crucial issue is the response to:

the texture and movement of your words, not to their meaning (for the meaning that any poetry can convey is common to all readers and writers in every language) but to the stuff itself out of which the poetry is made.<sup>135</sup>

Thomas further insists that a successful poem is one in which the words and images are "inevitable," in which each component partakes of and contributes to the organic form of the whole. A word or phrase is inevitable if it is "the one right word"; and, he writes to Pamela Hansford Johnson, "There must be no compromise; there is always the one right word: use it."<sup>136</sup> Responding to a genteel criticism from Miss Johnson, Thomas asserts that "there is no reason at all why I should not write of gunmen, cinemas, & pylons if what I have to say necessitates it. Those words & images were essential."<sup>137</sup> Inevitability is the only standard in choosing the words which "what I have to say" demands; and the inevitable "one right word" rises out of the necessity of the form. As a critic, Thomas asserts, inevitability is the standard by which he judges "a line of poetry"; each word and line must further the structural movement of the poem to "its own end":<sup>138</sup>

One disagrees with a line of poetry because one discovers . . . that it is not inevitable, it could be changed, the wrong words have been used, or the right words in the wrong order, indeed one changes them about in the mind as one reads; but when the inevitable line appears . . . the music is made, the magic is done, the sound and the spell remain.<sup>139</sup>

In his critical reading of "Welsh Poets," Thomas admires Henry Vaughan's poem "The Night" for its "wild, and yet inevitably ordered, sacred landscape";<sup>1-3</sup> and he praises the poetry of W.H. Davies because "there was inevitability in his slightest verses," (*italics mine*).<sup>4-1</sup> As Thomas wrote to Vernon Watkins, the inevitable words and lines in inevitable combination are what create the life of art, making poems "living," active entities:

All the words are lovely, but they seem so chosen, not struck out. I can see the sensitive picking of words, but none of the strong, inevitable pulling that makes a poem an event, a happening, an action perhaps, not a still-life or an experience put down, placed, regulated . . . . I want a poem to do more than just to have the appearance of "having been created."<sup>12-1</sup>

The work on words, then, can produce a living form; the words can be rendered active and living and they can be related in new forms which make a poem "an event, a happening, an action"--an emotional, sensual, intellectual, and imaginative experience. The poem is life rather than a representation or imitation of life; it is an experience which happens, not "an experience put down, placed, regulated."

Finally, in the "Poetic Manifesto," Thomas conveys his sense of the magic and mystery of poetry and his conviction that the poem is much more than its craftsmanship; and he sees the mystery consisting in the fact that the poet creates life out of words:

You can tear a poem apart to see what makes it technically tick, and say to yourself, when the works are laid out before you, the vowels, the consonants, the rhymes & rhythms, "Yes, this is it. This is why the poem moves me so. It is because of the craftsmanship." But you're back again where you began. You're back with the mystery of having been moved by words. The best craftsmanship always leaves holes & gaps in the works of the poem so that something that is not in the poem can creep, crawl, flash, or thunder in.<sup>143</sup>

All that matters is "the mystery of having been moved by words." And the "something that is not in the poem" is something that cannot be explained by the craftsmanship, the "work on words" alone; it is something which the poet thus attempts to convey through metaphors of life's creative movement, energy, and power--"creep, crawl, flash, or thunder." The poem exists for the reader as a living, concrete reality; and Thomas thus demands that his poems be taken "literally" and encountered imaginatively by "my readers, the strangers,"<sup>144</sup> as living moments of experience. The "inevitable," organic form of the poem--and of its parts in relation to one another--speaks to the reader's emotions and imagination. It "moves" the reader on a deeper level than the rational. Earlier in the "Poetic Manifesto" Thomas "defines" poetry solely in terms of its emotional effect, its ability to "move" the reader through his emotional response to the "eternal movement" of the poem:

If you want a definition of poetry, say:  
 "Poetry is what makes me laugh or cry or  
 yawn, what makes my toenails twinkle, what

makes me want to do this or that or nothing," and let it go at that. All that matters about poetry is the enjoyment of it, however tragic it may be. All that matters is the eternal movement behind it, the vast undercurrent of human grief, folly, pretension, exaltation, or ignorance, however unlofty the intention of the poem.<sup>145</sup>

All that matters is the vital movement and process which the poem brings to its readers. Whatever the response to a poem, the "magic" and the power and value of its existence derive from the fact that "it moves":

Almost anything one says about poetry is as true and important as anything else that anyone else has said. Some people react physically to the magic of poetry, to the moments, that is, of authentic revelation, of the communication, the sharing, at its highest level, of personal experience . . . . Others say that they have a kind of a sort of a vague feeling somewhere that "this is the real stuff." Others claim that their "purely aesthetic emotion" was induced by certain assonances and alliterations. And some are content merely to say, as they said of the first cinematographic picture, "By God, it moves." And so, of course, by God, it does, for that is another name for the magic beyond definition . . . .<sup>146</sup>

In his insistence that the poem "does its work" by an appeal to the emotional and imaginative apprehension, rather than to the rational, intellectual understanding of its "meaning," Thomas implicitly demands what Susan Sontag has called "an erotics of art."<sup>147</sup> For in his last poem Thomas images poetry as "a burning and crested act," a fiery and vital "act" of love and affirmation of the creative powers of life and of the imagination's poetic process; and this "act," which creates the poem, is

embodied in its structure, thus rendering it a "burning and crested," living reality. The "mystery"--for both poet and reader--resides in the very experience of creation.

This "burning and crested act" is both the process-act of creation and its product; it is also the pattern of all life, and the poet actively experiences this formative pattern in his imaginative and loving encounter with the "literal world," in his self-creation and unification, in his revitalization of language, and in his actual creation of a new living form in the poetic process. Through his imaginative experience of these modes of creation, the poet comes to his unitive vision of the identity of all existence in terms of the creative process; and the structural basis of his poem--as he describes it, for example, in the "centre of images" passage--is this pattern of the formative, creative "act." The poem does not explain but rather renders the imagination's "act" of identification and creation; and it does so through its structure and texture and through the relationships established within the poem itself. Thomas makes this explicit in his advice to Pamela Hansford Johnson concerning a poem in which she attempts to reveal her sense of relationship with nature by direct, rational statement, by telling rather than by structurally and imagistically showing:

By the magic of words and images you must make it clear to him [the reader] that the relationships are real. And only in, "My

blood is drawn from the veins of the roses," do you provide any proof. You gave the rose a human vein, and you gave your own vein the blood of the rose; now that is relationship. "I am his son," means little compared with "I am his flesh and blood."

This is a final compression of what I want to say about the "Poem," . . . . As it is, the 16 lines are all separate, too separate . . . . Though you talk all through of the relationship of yourself to other things, there is no relationship at all in the poem between the things you example. If you are one with the swallow & one with the rose, then the rose is one with the swallow. Link together these things you talk of, show, in your words & images, how your flesh covers the tree & the tree's flesh covers you. I see what you have done, of course--"I am one with the opposites," you say. You are, I know, but you must prove it to me by linking yourself to the opposites and by linking the opposites together. Only in the "rose" line did you do it.<sup>148</sup>

The structure of the poem, the relationship of words, phrases, lines to each other reveals the unitive "act." Thomas asserts that the poem creates new associations, embodying them in unique "linkings" of images and words. Poetry reveals the unifying truth of the imagination's vision; Miss Johnson's poem, for example, attempts to reveal her sense of the identity of all creation. And the poem must reveal this in the imagination's mode of expression--in images--rather than in the rational mode of direct statement. To paraphrase Thomas, "I am one with the flower" means little compared with "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower/Drives my green age." The poet must image, not describe, the truth of relationship and the creative process, through the total form of the poem.



Thomas declares, several years later, that the rendering of this unitive vision, this perception of identity, is precisely the goal of his own poems: "'seeking kinship,' with everything . . . is exactly what I do do."<sup>149</sup>

Poetry, Thomas further insists, is "about" poetry-- "I prefer what I think about verse to be in the verse,"<sup>150</sup> he wrote to Oscar Williams. And in a letter to Henry Treece he discussed the difference between "social awareness" revealed in poems through images, and poetry which is about politics:

My poetry isn't concerned with politics (supposedly the science of achieving and "administrating" human happiness) but with poetry (which is unsentimental revelation and to which happiness is no more important--or any other word--than misery).<sup>151</sup>

The poetic process is, Thomas reveals in the "centre of images" passage, an essentially organic and imaginative one, in which the images breed, grow, conflict, and die into newly-created images and into ultimate reconciliation. The product of such a process is also, therefore, organic, creative and living; although a poem is a static object, fixed on paper, its form is organic--imaging the active, creative, "organic reality" of life: "Poetry, heavy in tare though nimble, should be as orgiastic and organic as copulation."<sup>152</sup>

The poem is itself a concrete, individuated and new life form; it is whole, independent, and unchanging--a "watertight section" within the flux of existence, the



"living stream of time . . . that is flowing all ways."<sup>153</sup>

A poem is a vital and important moment of human experience and a significant image of reality:

A good poem is a contribution to reality. The world is never the same once a good poem has been added to it. A good poem helps to change the shape and significance of the universe, helps to extend everyone's knowledge of himself and the world around him . . . .<sup>154</sup>

As Thomas wrote to Vernon Watkins, a poem should be "an event, a happening, an action perhaps, not a still-life or an experience put down, placed, regulated." And in his discussion of Sir Philip Sidney's Astrophel and Stella, Thomas emphasizes the growth of the sequence from poems which are "still lifes" to those which are "events," from poems about experience to poems which are living, "striding and burning" embodiments of experience:

They begin with elegance and pretence, poems moving like courtiers dressed in the habit of love. They are about love, they are not in love; they address love, they do not speak out of it. The raptures are almost easily come by; the despair almost as easily relinquished. They are the most perfect exercises for a man about to be in love. And Penelope married, and Sidney had lost her, and the sonnets were no longer rehearsals for a poetic event but poetry itself, striding and burning . . . . In these sonnets we see, held still in time for us, a whole progress of passion.<sup>155</sup>

And he criticizes one of Watkins's poems because it seems "to me 'literary' not living"; it seems to come out of the nostalgia of literature; the growth is not, like, say, Rossetti's, a hothouse growth, but one that has been seeded from a flower placed, long ago in the smelling and

blowing and growing past, between pages . . . .  
 I think I ask you for a little creative  
 destruction, destructive creation.<sup>156</sup>

He admires Henry Miller's work, therefore, because "it has . . . more guts and blood in it than new English prose books have . . . but it is a pity he writes, so often, in the old literary way to achieve it."<sup>157</sup>

Thomas describes the kind of poems he wants to write in terms which emphasize both the concrete, vital nature of the poems and his sense of their living relationship to the active processes of life, as the poems are experienced by his readers: "I want to build poems big & solid enough for people to be able to walk & sit about and eat & drink and make love in them"<sup>158</sup> One function of poetry, then, is to affirm life's creative process by creating concrete actualized life which can be lived in; as the poet writes out of "heart and mind and muscle,"<sup>159</sup> so the reader experiences the poems emotionally and sensually as well as imaginatively.

"Art is praise," Thomas declares, "and it is sane to praise, for, praising, we praise the godliness that gives us sanity."<sup>160</sup> The poem is a poem of life--in "praise" of life's creative process and potential. Writing poetry is "a burning and crested act" of joy, love, and affirmation of and through creation:

The joy and function of poetry is, and was,  
 the celebration of man, which is also the  
 celebration of God.<sup>161</sup>

I read somewhere of a shepherd who, when asked why he made, from within fairy rings, ritual observances to the moon to protect his flocks, replied: "I'd be a damn' fool if I didn't!" These poems, with all their crudities, doubts, and confusions, are written for the love of Man and in praise of God, and I'd be a damn' fool if they weren't.<sup>162</sup>

Poetry, then, is "celebration" and "praise"; and the poet is motivated by "love of man" and of the creative potential which he shares with God and nature. The making of poems is, for Thomas, an affirmative act of creation by which the poet engages in the creative process which is nature's pattern of life. The poet thus "imitates" nature by engaging in the identical process of creation; and, like nature's, as Thomas has asserted, the poet's creative process is organic. The "organic" poem is not, however, a replica of an organic creature and therefore physically alive in the same way that a man or a flower is; rather, the poem's vitality consists in the fact that it renders and embodies--in image, structure, texture, and movement--the organic, formative process--the creative act--by which it, and all organic creatures, are made. Nature creates physical forms. The poet creates verbal structures, and in both cases the forms are unique, self-sufficient, and vital; the completed poem has "a self-contained identity"--it is "itself,"<sup>163</sup> paradoxically independent of its creator.

The force that drives the poet is ultimately the loving desire to affirm, praise, and celebrate life through

the creation of living forms. And Thomas finds his subject in this commitment; the Collected Poems are embodiments of the creative process which brings them into existence. Thomas's volume of poems is a celebration of creation in all its multiform modes.

### The Poetics and the Poems: A Critical Method

Thomas's poetics also provide a critical method of reading his poems of life. The "centre of images" passage metaphorically describes Thomas's conception of the organic process by which his poems are created, revealing that it is a growth pattern which begins with a "central seed" of images and builds a completed structure. The critic must begin with this completed artifact and perceive the structure by a process of "centering"--a reversal of the creative process which, Thomas tells us, makes the poem; the critic thus moves from analysis of the larger elements of structure to an apprehension of the "central seed," the crucial relationships of words and images which create the movement, pattern, and process--what Thomas called "texture"--inherent within the external structure. Thomas asserts the primary value of such an analysis and, in fact, states that poetry can only be discussed in terms of structure and texture:

The meaning of a poem you cannot . . . talk about in any way constructively . . . . It is only the texture of a poem that can be discussed at all . . . there's nothing to discuss except the means, the words themselves,<sup>164</sup>

by which the poem "moves." By texture, Thomas is clearly referring to internal structure and relationships, the movement of the poem "to its own end."<sup>165</sup>

Thomas demands--and exemplifies in his remarks about others' poems--a critical method which emphasizes the necessity of a perception of the poem's "wholeness" and "integrity" through an aesthetic analysis of the elements of which the poem's structure is built; each element--each word--must be "valued according to its individual life,"<sup>166</sup> as well as in its relationship to all other elements of the poem. The study of a poem must always focus on these relationships within the poem's total form. And each poem, according to Thomas, is a unique and particular creation which establishes its own context and its own terms of analysis. Thomas's criticism of Dame Edith Sitwell's sociological analysis of a line in "Altarwise By Owl-Light"--an analysis, in other words, based on reference to ideas which are outside the poem--serves as an example of the critical method which he felt his poems demand:

Edith Sitwell's analysis . . . of the lines "The atlas-eater with a jaw for news/Bit out the mandrake with tomorrow's scream," seems to me very vague and Sunday-journalish. She says the lines refer to "the violent speed and the sensation-loving, horror-loving craze of modern life." She doesn't take the literal meaning . . . . This poem is a particular incident in a particular adventure, not a general, elliptical deprecation of this "horrible, crazy, speedy life."<sup>167</sup>

It is, then, necessary to analyze and study individual poems as self-contained entities rather than to dissect them and

select elements which exemplify particular thematic or prosodical theses of the critic; it is also invalid and irrelevant to attempt to define critical progress, to reveal similarities, differences, and influences, or "prove" generalizations about theme, "meaning," and style through comparison and contrast of particular parts of poems--individual images and words separated from their created context. Poetical progress and development can best be perceived in the context of a close study of the structure, texture, and movement of those poems which reveal important poetic achievements as well as render the crucial moments of awakening and growth of creative power and ability in the poet's growth as a creator, his "struggle from darkness towards some measure of light."<sup>168</sup>

## CHAPTER II

### CELEBRATION OF UNITY IN NATURE'S CREATIVE-DESTRUCTIVE PROCESS: "THE FORCE THAT THROUGH THE GREEN FUSE DRIVES THE FLOWER"

A central focus in Thomas's Collected Poems is on the autonomous consciousness within the poem; this "I" of the poems is the poetic consciousness which makes the poem and whose act is rendered in the poem's movement. The poems, then, are not autobiographical descriptions; the "I" in the poems is not Dylan Thomas, the man. Rather, it is Thomas's creative and creating imagination, which transforms the raw material of sensual perception and intellectual understanding into the living images which embody the value and reality of the poet's imaginative vision. Even in poems such as "Fern Hill" and "Poem in October," which clearly have their source in the man's personal experience, this material is transformed and given shape and value by the poet's imagination.

When the "I" in the poems is referred to as "the poet," then, it is understood to mean the autonomous, imagining, and creating consciousness which makes the poem, rather than Dylan Thomas, the personality. Thomas himself explains the distinction between the man and the poet and thus between his sensory, emotional, and intellectual experiences of the world and the imagination's act of transformation and creation:

What's more, a poet is a poet for such a very tiny bit of his life; for the rest, he is a human being, one of whose responsibilities is to know and feel, as much as he can, all that is moving around and within him, so that his poetry, when he comes to write it, can be his attempt at an expression of the summit of man's experience on this very peculiar and, in 1946, this apparently hell-bent earth.<sup>1</sup>

The "human being," then, must sensually and intellectually experience the "wonders" of self and the world to the fullest extent possible, in preparation for those moments of imaginative, poetic creation.

It is the poetic, creating function of the imagination whose act of creation is embodied in the poems. Each poem renders the imagination's creative process in terms of a single concrete experience of it--in the making of that particular poem. Thus, the experience and act of the "I" of each poem is unique; and the differences in structure, image, pattern, and movement among Thomas's Collected Poems--from early to late--reveal the growth and expansion of the creative powers of the imagination--from the "I" which is "dumb to tell" its unity with all creation, to the "I" which has the imaginative ability to submerge itself in complete unity with life's process, and to create celebration and "ceremony" out of the destructive process of an event such as a "fire raid."

The emphasis in the earlier poems is on the poet's imaginative response to the perception of his own relationship and identity with all other living forms as well as



with the natural process which the creative consciousness must imitate. According to Thomas's poetics, the poet's central concern as a creator is "to bring these wonders into myself" and render his unitive vision of the creative process in the form of a poem. The poem is itself a recreation of the emotional, intellectual, and imaginative experience of nature's process and of the creative imagination's role and function in it. And each poem is itself an image of the process which is its subject and theme--the poem is both the process and the product, the "enquiry" and the "result."

Many of the poems in the first half of Thomas's Collected Poems--roughly corresponding to the volumes 18 Poems (1934) and 25 Poems (1936)--reveal themselves as attempts to render in verbal form--"by the magic of words and images"--the poet's active and loving encounter with the "organic reality" of the natural world, and his imaginative perception of the creative-destructive process of life. These poems also render his perception of the unity of all existence in this process of birth, growth, and death. Thomas's discursive statements in letters written during this period also deal with the emotional and imaginative apprehension of the "objects" of the "literal world" and with the necessity for the poet to expand his consciousness, through new angles of vision and understanding, in order to perceive the creative process of existence.

The poet's attempt to embody "these wonders" of nature's creation is, in the earlier poems, structured in rigidly controlled, almost symmetrical stanzaic forms. Yet within these intellectually controlled external forms, the imaginative "act" of identification and creation is embodied in the internal structure of "words and images" in vital relationship, which moves the poem "towards its own end." Early poems which attempt this, with varying degrees of success, include "A Process In The Weather Of The Heart,"<sup>2</sup> "This Bread I Break" (45), "Do You Not Father Me" (54), "Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines" (29), "When Once The Twilight Locks No Longer" (4), "Foster The Light" (69), "Here In This Spring" (53), and "I See The Boys Of Summer" (1).

Although structurally and thematically similar to these other early poems, the poem which most successfully exemplifies this attempt, and achieves its goal of rendering the imaginative perception of the essence of the creative-destructive process of existence and of the poetic creator's identification with it is "The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower" (10). This poem also renders the poet's sense of his inability to communicate effectively-- "And I am dumb to tell"--with the other organic creatures made and destroyed, as he is, by the process. And thus the poem embodies a stage in the poet's development as an "imitator" of nature, as an imaginer and a creator. He has transcended the early time of innocence when, as in the

first stanza of "In The Beginning," all was "one":

One smile of light across the empty face;  
One bough of bone across the rooting air (27).


He is an individuated and differentiated consciousness, an autonomous perceiver who is separate and distinct from the world which he perceives. In "The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower" this differentiated consciousness---"I"---perceives the essential identity which exists between himself and the natural world; yet he feels his failure to render it to himself---"to mouth unto my veins"---as well as to the "organic reality" which he experiences. The poem itself, then, is an image of the process of growth--not only in terms of the natural process which is its subject, but also as it renders the poet's own growth as a creator, through his identification with the process and his consciousness of his function as "teller."

Thomas once told Vernon Watkins that Watkins failed to understand "the logic of my poem." And the "logic" of "The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower" is the logic of nature's dialectical process rather than of the mind's. The poem, like the process which its "words and images" describe, oscillates between life and death, between the creative and destructive powers of existence; the "logic" of the poem is therefore determined by the nature of the creative-destructive act. Each element of the poem's structure functions to move the poem as a whole

to a revelation and embodiment of this creative-destructive process of life and of the poet's relationship to it; he is a passive participant in the process--as is the "crooked rose," for example--yet he also takes an active part in the process through his function as a creator. All of the linguistic modes of embodying the creative-destructive process function to strengthen the "host of images" which represents the essential imaginative creation, the "central seed" out of which the poet's "craft" and "art" create the artifact.

The poem consists of four five-line stanzas, tightly controlled segments of almost identical syntactical structure, and a concluding couplet which recapitulates the concluding couplets of each of the four stanzas. Each stanza is closed, with a full stop at the end of the final line; and each stanza consists of images in the syntactical structure of direct statements. The imaginative creation is thus rendered in the intellectual form of the declarative sentence:

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower  
Drives my green age;



Two elements of the structure, then--the closed stanzaic form and the declarative sentences which "carry" the images--are rational modes of expression. But the pattern of the poem--the oscillating movement between images of creation and destruction--is the pattern of nature's process. And this relationship between the stanza form and the internal

movement is parallel to the relationship between the sentence form--an intellectual structure--and the images which "conflict" within it.

This structural combination of the intellectual and imaginative modes of understanding and expressing the poet's vision---exemplified by the integration of the sentence and the image--reveals the integration of intellect and imagination, which is necessary for the poet's achievement of the creative act; this structural device, then, itself images the union of "craft" and "art" which Thomas's poetics demand.<sup>3</sup> The intellectual understanding of the process *gr* *up* *2* which the poem embodies is revealed in the fact that the poem is in statement form; while the imaginative apprehension and identification with the process are clearly emphasized by the fact that the sentences consist only of images--- creations of the imagination which embody and show, rather than state, relationship. Thus the poem renders its truth by both embodying and stating it, through an integration of the imaginative and intellectual functions of mind in the creative act.

The poem's rhythm and movement are accomplished through the movement of the syntax and pausal patterns and through the imagistic oscillation between the creative and destructive powers of the "force." The result is a pulsating rhythm and a rising and falling movement which syntactically images the pattern of the natural process of

creation and destruction. The pausal patterns, for example, emphasize the relationship between the two modes of creation and destruction. In the first two stanzas the images of the opposing yet complementary powers of the "force" are separated by a semi-colon--a partial rather than a full stop--in the middle of the sentence which makes up the first three lines; and this pause indicates both connection and separation. Thus, the semi-colon emphasizes the image shift from the creative to the destructive powers-- from "drives the flower" to "blasts the roots":

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower  
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees  
Is my destroyer . . . .

The force that drives the water through the rocks  
Drives my red blood; that dries the mouth of streams  
Turns mine to wax.

In both stanzas, the first one-and-a-half lines, preceding the semicolon, image creation and the second one-and-a-half lines following the semicolon, embody destruction. The integral relationship between creation and destruction is thus rendered by the semicolon.

In the third stanza, in contrast, though the semicolon occurs in the same position as in the first two, there are images of both creation and destruction on both sides of the caesura:

The hand that whirls the water in the pool  
Stirs the quicksand; that ropes the blowing wind  
Hauls my shroud sail.

• The third stanza thus renders the poet's perception of an even closer link between creation and destruction than is imaged in the syntax of the first two stanzas. In stanzas one and two the poet perceives that the same "force" is both creative and destructive. • In the third stanza the forces of life and death are seen as identical--the "hand" creates and destroys; it "whirls the water in the pool" and "stirs the quicksand" in the same syntactical unit. • The fourth stanza completes the poet's perception of the identity of the forces of life and death; and this perception is imaged in the movement of the semicolon to the end of the first line. This partial stop at the end of the first line, in contrast to the open endedness of the first lines of the first three stanzas, alters the rhythm and movement of this stanza, rendering it more abrupt, and emphasizes the further compression of the identification of the processes of life and death in a single image: "The lips of time leech to the fountain head."

The pausal patterns of the poem also render the separation between the poet's perception of life's process and his sense of his function "to tell" it to himself and to the organic creatures he encounters. The first three lines of each stanza imagistically and syntactically embody the poet's unitive vision of creation and destruction; and in each stanza these first three lines are end-stopped, separated from the concluding couplet by a period. The final couplet of each stanza is unpunctuated, save for the final



stop which ends the stanza; and this free-running sentence focuses on the poet's imaginative attempt and goal--"to tell" "how" his existence is identical to that of each "object" of the "literal world."

The concluding couplet--the coda of the poem--recapitulates the earlier couplets in imagery and form. The rhythm of oscillation between images of creation and destruction throughout the poem moves the poem back and forth to its ultimate end in this coda, in which the lack of separating punctuation unites with imagery that yokes life and death--"the lover's tomb"--to render the poet's unitive vision in the context of his function as "teller," as creator of a form which is capable of embodying the truth of his imaginative vision.

The oscillating, pulsating movement of the poem--as it alternates between the creative and destructive powers of the same "force"--is augmented by the rising and falling movement created by the variance in line length of the first three stanzas, which are rhythmically and syntactically identical. In each of these stanzas, the first two long lines--with a pause in the middle of the second line--move toward the short, abrupt, full-stopped third line. The rising feeling of the first lines parallels the powerful, bursting images of creation in those opening lines. And the abrupt, falling movement of the third lines, ending with the finality of a full stop, parallels the images of destruction which culminate in the third line:



The force that through the green fuse drives the flower  
 Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees  
 Is my destroyer . . . .

The force that drives the water through the rocks  
 Drives my red blood; that dries the mouthing streams  
 Turns mine to wax . . . .

The hand that whirls the water in the pool  
 Stirs the quicksand; that ropes the blowing wind  
 Hauls my shroud sail . . . .

The formal repetition of this pattern images the movement of rising to life and falling to the full stop of death which the poem's images render. The fourth stanza provides a contrast to the first three in terms of rhythm and the pattern of movement as well as by its alteration in pausal pattern. The short third line, instead of rendering an image of destructive power, as it does in the first three stanzas, violates the expectations conditioned by the earlier stanzas and emphasizes the redeeming, creative power of love.

The repetition of this structural pattern is emphasized and elaborated by verbal repetition; for the sense of recurrence in the cyclical pattern of the creative-destructive process of existence is augmented by both structural and linguistic repetition. In all four stanzas, the first lines begin with "The"; the fourth lines, as well as the first line of the coda, begin with "And I am dumb," and the final line of each stanza, with the exception of the first, begins with "How." The repetition of these general, non-imagistic words renders the poet's movement in perception. "The"---the definite article---introduces direct statements of

the truths which the poet has perceived in his encounter with life's objects and the underlying process which creates and destroys them. "And I am dumb" reflects the poet's sense of his inability to render his imaginative vision, and its repetition in each stanza and in the coda suggests an almost ritual act of contrition and plea for redemption; in this case, the poet wishes to "redeem" and activate his own creative powers. "How"--an introductory word usually followed by a question--further emphasizes the poet's questioning of his capability "to tell" the truth of his perception and to create a living form which will embody his unitive vision.

Certain other words which are repeated in the poem function as linking words, verbally rendering the unity between opposing images. "Crooked" characterizes both "rose" in stanza one and "worm" in the coda---embodying the perceived unity of the growing, blossoming process and the destructive, devouring process. "Green" renders the vitality and creative power of youth--"my green age"--as well as the explosive power by which "the green fuse" grows and produces its flower, thus embodying the oneness of self and flower in terms of the forceful process of creation.

•The explosive forcefulness of the powers of creation and destruction is also expressed in the preponderance of strong, powerful words of one syllable, words with "sound and shape" which, in relationship to one another, combine to

move the poem with a strong, pulsating rhythm which is itself an image of the "force" which "drives" all life. And the perception of unity embodied in the images is also revealed linguistically. "Drives" is repeated from stanza one to stanza two; in both stanzas "drives" is the verb which expresses the action of the creative power of the "force":

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower  
Drives my green age . . . .

The force that drives the water through the rocks  
Drives my red blood . . . .

And in stanza two the close relationship between the creative power and its destructive counterpart is imaged in the close phonemic relationship between "drives" and the verb which renders the action of destruction--"dries."

The force that drives the water through the rocks  
Drives my red blood; that dries the mouthing streams  
Turns mine to wax.

Again in stanza two, repetition of "mouth"--used as both noun and verb and yoking the couplet to the "mouthing streams" of the second line, linguistically embodies the sense of unity between blood and water which the poet feels unable to render:

And I am dumb to mouth unto my veins  
How at the mountain-spring the same mouth sucks.

All of these "tricks"<sup>4</sup> of language and "craft" function to present the imaginative creation--the poem's "host of

images"--in the structure which is "inevitable" for the rendering of the perception of unity which represents this bursting moment of creative growth in the imagination's development as a creator. The richness and density of the patterns of imagery within the poem are the products of the amplification and elaboration of its central "host of images."






The first stanza images the explosive power of both creation and destruction in the image of "the green fuse" which produces the flower, and the power of the "force" which also "blasts the roots of trees." A clear relationship is established between this botanical creation-destruction and the movement from youth to age--from "my green age" to "wintry fever"--of the poet. The controlling image of the first stanza is an image, then, of the process of growth, in terms of explosive moments rather than of a steady, logical, upward progression from one point to the next. In "When Once The Twilight Locks No Longer," a poem which images the creator's process and focuses on his relationship to his created object, there is a similar image of birth and growth:

My fuses timed to charge his heart,  
He blew like powder to the light  
And held a little sabbath with the sun (4)

And the "childbirth" poems--"Before I Knocked" (8), "A Saint About To Fall" (105), and "'If My Head Hurt A Hair's Foot'" (108)--are images of the bursting moment of creation and of the process of growth, which consists of such

moments. As the flower explodes from the "green fuse," so the child pushes forth from the womb; and, in a similar way, the speaker's "green age" is pushed onward by forceful leaps of growth and individuation, culminating, finally, in the "wintry fever" which presages death.

 This image is related to the central concern of the poem--the poet's role as a renderer of life's process by  creation of poems--which is the focus of the concluding couplet of each stanza as well as of the poem's coda. In this context the opening image, in stanza one, renders the experience of the bursting "flower"--producing moment of awakening and illumination.

 The succeeding two stanzas particularize and concretize "green age" to the source of physical vitality in "my red blood" and also carry the "wintry fever" of decaying old age to its conclusion in death--"my shroud sail." And the central "host of images" is revealed in the images of water and blood in the second, third, and fourth stanzas. The "host of images" which revolves around water and blood functions to render the unity of the processes of creation and destruction through amplification of the relationship between blood, the poet's life source, and water, earth's life source. In stanza two, "water" and "my red blood" are clearly identified in the poet's perception. The "force" which gives life and death both "drives" and "dries" "the mouthing streams" and turns the poet's blood stream "to wax."

"The water in the pool" in the third stanza is inevitably linked to the "mouthing streams," the "water" driven "through the rocks," and "the mountain spring" which form the central image cluster of the second stanza. Thus, the stream of the poet's blood is associated, by the relationship to water established in the second stanza, with the third stanza's image of the "shroud sail"; for this image amplifies the second stanza's suggestion of death in the image of blood turned to wax by the undertaker.

The imagistic linking and identifying of water and blood in the second and third stanzas is further amplified in stanza four to render the identity of the creative source for both nature and poet. The fourth stanza images this creative power as water; "the fountain head" which time leeches recalls the final image of the second stanza-- "How at the mountain spring the same mouth sucks." The "fountain head" and the "mountain spring" are sources of bursting creative energy, and are thus paralleled to the source of the poet's life--"my red blood." And the fourth stanza elaborates the image of blood as it is related to the image of "Love," which motivates creation and which, like the water, "drips and gathers." The "fallen blood" redeems Love's creative power from the "lips of time":

Love drips and gathers, but the fallen blood  
Shall calm her sores.

Finally, in the poem's coda, love's creative force and

death's destructive power--which have been imaged in the identity between the operation of nature's process on water and blood--are united in the image of "the lover's tomb" and of the poet's "sheet" of many functions--winding sheet, bed sheet, and paper on which the poet creates a poem.

The act of identification and creation--of which the poem is a record--is rendered in the poem's movement from separation to unification; this movement is imaged in the changing relationship between the "I" and the other creatures of the world, as well as in the imagistic particularization of the creative-destructive "force." In the first three stanzas, the relationship between poet and world is directly stated with emphasis on the "I" and his perception of the unity between nature's process and "my green age," "my" blood, and "my" shroud. The poet's perception is gradually widened and elaborated, from his identification with single elements--the plants of stanza one and the streams of stanza two--to his imagistic identification, in stanza three, with the elements of "the blowing wind" and the "quicksand" as well as with "the water in the pool." And there is no personal reference in line two of the third stanza to parallel "my green age" and "my red blood" in stanzas one and two. This points to stanza four, in which the identification is complete; the perceiver disappears in the process. Until the couplet's statement of the poet's goal, there is no direct statement of relationship and no personal pronoun:



The lips of time leech to the fountain head;  
 Love drips and gathers, but the fallen blood  
 Shall calm her sores . . . .


The movement from "force" to "hand" to "lips" also images the poetic movement towards increasing perception of identification with the creative power of the process in which the poetic consciousness is engaged. In stanzas one and two, in which the imagination relates to single elements, the creative-destructive powers of existence are imaged in terms of cosmic "force." Stanza three particularizes and humanizes this "force" into "hand." And the image of death is also humanized; the "hanging man" to whom the poet wishes to communicate--as he wished "to tell" the dying rose and his own veins--has been killed, not by the natural process which destroys the rose, but by the "hand" of other men. Thus the particularization of "force" into "hand" reveals the creative and destructive powers of man, his abilities to "imitate" nature's process. The hangman destroys life; the poet, in contrast, wishes to create new life, "to tell" the living truths of his imaginative perceptions.

Finally, the poetic consciousness humanizes the cosmic control of time in stanza four: "the lips of time." The images which render the poet's goal, after the moment of complete identification, are more cosmic, embodying time's control over all the workings of the universe; the clock of time "has ticked a heaven round the stars." The poet wishes "to tell" this perception to nature's cycle of



seasons and weathers--" a weather's wind"; he seeks, that is, to embody in his poems the reality of time's power.

The coda points to the poem's constant emphasis on the poet's relationship to the "force" of creation and destruction and on his function in the context of this process. He must experience and perceive and then must "tell" the reality of his encounter. Throughout the poem, and more particularly in the last two lines of each stanza, the focus is on "I," on the poetic consciousness as a perceiver distinct from the "literal world" which he encounters; he is both within and outside it--participating in the process at the same time that he steps back from it and observes its workings.

 The poem is not, however, simply a description of natural observations; for the poetic consciousness is actively engaged in the experience--the fourth stanza reveals a momentary but complete absorption of the poet in the process. The poet is also actively engaged in the quest for a voice in which he can render the reality of his perceptions in organic forms--forms, that is, that can "tell" the process to the organic, living and dying creatures with whom he identifies--to the "crooked rose," to "my veins," to "the hanging man," to the "weather's wind," and finally, to "the lover's tomb." The poet's consciousness of his identity with the creative-destructive process-- which he imaginatively perceives and images in the first three lines of each stanza--points to the next stage in his

cont

development as a creator--imaged in the final two lines of each stanza; he must learn "how" to render the living truth of his perceptions and experience. His goal is thus to move beyond the identification which he achieves, beyond assimilation of the fact of creation, to poetic imitation of the creative process.

\* The experience which this poem presents, of the encounter and identification with life's process, is thus one of the bursting moments of awakening which the "green fuse" images. It is an awakening to an imaginative, emotional, and intellectual apprehension of the essential nature of life's process; and it is also, therefore, an awakening to the possibilities of creation available to the poet. The couplets, with their almost ritualistic repetition of "And I am dumb to tell . . . /How," image and state the poet's predicament--his inability to fulfill the creative promise which he perceives. Although his function is "to tell," he feels incapable of giving verbal form--"And I am dumb"--to the vital reality of the process; he cannot adequately render his unitive vision in an external form which is "inevitable." He can only embody it in rigid, closed external structures. Yet the poem's internal structure, which creates movement and process, foreshadows the later accomplishment of Thomas's imagination; for he moves to more open, imaginative forms in which the central "host of images" more clearly dictates the structure.

## CHAPTER III

### CELEBRATION OF THE IMAGINATION'S CREATIVE POWER WITHIN LIFE'S TEMPORAL MOVEMENT: THE GROWTH OF VISION---

#### "I SEE THE BOYS OF SUMMER" AND "FERN HILL"

Two poems which reveal, by comparison and contrast, the movement from closed to open forms, and towards expansion of vision, are "I See The Boys Of Summer" (1), and "Fern Hill" (178). In terms of subject and theme they are similar; but in mood and tone, as well as in structure, texture, and image, they are quite different--and the contrast reveals the growth of the poet's vision and of his ability to render this vision with greater clarity in unique open forms. The contrast between these two poems also reveals the growth in the poetry which Thomas described in 1949:

I like to think that the poems most narrowly odd are among those I wrote earliest, and that the later poems are wider and deeper.<sup>1</sup>

"The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower" images the unity of all life in terms of nature's creative-destructive process; "I See The Boys Of Summer" reveals a particularization in the perception of this process, for it images the process of human growth in the context of the seasonal cycle--from "green age" to "wintry fever"--which the poetic consciousness seeks to assimilate

through identification with the boys of summer. As in "The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower," the focus is on the perceiving consciousness and his relationship to the boys of summer and to the process of human growth and decay which he imaginatively sees embodied in their youth.

The poem consists of three parts; each of the first two parts consists of four six-line stanzas, and the third part is one six-line stanza. Each stanza is, like those in "The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower," full-stopped at the end of the last line. The tripartite division of the poem reveals three distinct modes of perceiving, experiencing, and assimilating. The four stanzas of the first part syntactically reveal the separation between the perceiver and the perceived: "I see the boys of summer in their ruin . . ."; "I see the summer children in their mothers . . ."; and "I see that from these boys shall men of nothing . . . ." In part two, however, the speaker has relinquished his separateness and has identified with the boys; the only personal pronoun in the second four stanzas is "we": "We are the dark deniers . . ."; "We summer boys in this four-winded spinning . . ."; "In spring we cross our foreheads with the holly . . . ."

The movement towards this process of identification is imaged, in part one, as an imaginative process; the speaker imaginatively "sees" the boys in terms of their

present, past and future. The images of stanzas one and two describe the wild boys' existence in the present, with an eye to their "ruin"--which they partially create as they "Lay the gold tithings barren,/Setting no store by harvest, freeze the soils . . . ." In the third stanza, "I see the summer children in their mothers," as yet unborn but still active and vital and destructive, as they "Split up the browed womb's weathers . . . ." And the final vision, of the boys' future--"I see that from these boys shall men of nothing/Stature . . . ."--leads the perceiving consciousness into imaginative identification with the boys, with their green age"; and he thus moves to a clearer perception of the process which "drives" them. At the end of part two, he begins to move out of his identification with the boys, as indicated by the recurrence, from part one, of the detached, definite article to refer to them: "O see the poles of promise in the boys."

Out of this imaginative identification and assimilation, this movement into the experience of the boys, comes a larger apprehension of the process of growth which was only observed in part one. Part three represents an attempt at imaginative synthesis of the experience of both "I" and "we"; the poem's final stanza thus renders both the separateness of part one--"I see you boys"--and the identification of part two--"We are the sons"--which he has already relinquished by the end of stanza eight; the poem concludes:

I see you boys of summer in your ruin.  
 Man in his maggot's barren.  
 And boys are full and foreign in the pouch.  
 I am the man your father was.  
 We are the sons of flint and pitch.  
 O see the poles are kissing as they cross.

The "you," which here images separateness, also indicates an advance towards personalization over the phrase "the boys" in part one; the poetic consciousness has assimilated the experience to a limited extent. He has begun to perceive more clearly the process of human growth through his identification with the boys, but he is unable to truly personalize it, to place himself within the process by imaginative understanding; thus the poem can only offer a superficial synthesis by alternating between "I" and "we." And each line of this concluding stanza, in contrast to the preceding eight stanzas, is end-stopped, revealing still further the inability of the poetic consciousness to make the synthesis complete. This is despite the apparent obliteration of both "I" and "we" in the final line--"O see the poles are kissing as they cross,"--which comes closest to achieving a syntactical and rhythmical union between the final lines of parts one and two--"O see the pulse of summer in the ice," and "O see the poles of promise in the boys,"--as well as an imagistic union with the destructive "frozen loves" of stanza one.

Thomas wrote to Henry Treece in 1938 that:

I agree that each of my earlier poems might appear to constitute a section from one long poem; that is because I was not successful

in making a momentary peace with my images  
at the correct moment; images were left  
dangling over the formal limits, and  
dragged the poem into another.<sup>2</sup>

And many of the central images of "I See The Boys Of Summer" are reminiscent of those in, for example, "The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower." The "wintry fever" of "The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower" successfully and effectively compresses numerous wintry and freezing images which appear in "I See The Boys Of Summer." Three of the four stanzas in part one of "I See The Boys Of Summer," in fact, repeat and amplify this "central seed," building it into a "host of images" which renders the process that moves "the boys of summer" toward their "wintry fever":

I see the boys of summer in their ruin  
Lay the gold tithings barren,  
Setting no store by harvest, freeze the soils;  
There in their heat the winter floods  
Of frozen loves they fetch their girls,  
And drown the cargoed apples in their tides.

These boys of light are curdlers in their folly,  
Sour the boiling honey;  
The jacks of frost they finger in the hives;  
There in the sun the frigid threads  
Of doubt and dark they feed their nerves;  
The signal moon is zero in their voids . . . .

O see the pulse of summer in the ice.

The images which integrate the "seasons" of summer and winter are expanded and generalized in part two, in which life's process is "this four-winded spinning" and the "seasons must be challenged . . . ." And the summer boys

are also "green of the seaweeds' iron," again recalling "my green age" and pointing to the "green and dying" boy of "Fern Hill."

Although the boy of "Fern Hill" is "green and dying," he is not in "ruin," as are the "boys of summer"; instead he is "happy" as he sings his childhood. There is no image of the destructive nature of growth and aging to compare with the harsh "wintry" images of the earlier poems; and the severe anatomical images of death within the seed of life--"Man in his maggot's barren"--have disappeared. The poet's negative vision of the "boys of summer in their ruin" and of life's process of growth and aging--which leads only to the destruction of youth by "wintry fever" and, finally, to the "crooked worm" in the grave--has been transmuted in the wider vision of the creating consciousness of "Fern Hill." Through the imaginative use of memory,<sup>3</sup> the poet of "Fern Hill" can identify--as the poet of "I See The Boys Of Summer" could not wholly--with the child's perceptions and his unitive but ignorant vision of his world; and he can also assimilate his adult understanding of the process of life, in which time's movement controls all living creatures.

The poet's imaginative power enables him to be both child and man simultaneously; he can thus create, out of this synthesis, an artifact which embodies and celebrates the singing, "lilting" reality of the child's vision and



experience of the world as well as the adult's perception of the impermanence of youth. And in the act of creating the poem, the poet has conquered time and death; for although the boy is "dying," controlled and destroyed by time's process, the poem is out of time's control---it is a permanent and unchanging form which creates an eternal image of the child's vision, thus achieving victory over time.

Because the poet is able to achieve this victory over death and time, he is able to see time's process as creative as well as destructive and, therefore, as something to be valued and celebrated. The poet thus perceives time as partaking in the creative process, for time creates potentiality and possibility in the very act of destroying childhood's innocence; within the process of growth and individuation, the "singing" child of "Fern Hill" has become the poet, the singer and creator of "Fern Hill." This growth of the poet as an imaginer and creator is imaged in the contrast between "I See The Boys Of Summer" and "Fern Hill." In "I See The Boys Of Summer," growth and youth are imaged negatively---as destructive; the perceiving consciousness is dismayed that birth and growth lead only to death. The contrast to "Fern Hill" is clear; the entire poem is "happy," "lovely," "lilting," and "joyful"; the rhythm is flowing, "young and easy," and "running"; the imagery is "green and golden," beautiful and Edenic, and the

poem is one of the "few and such morning songs" celebrating life's creative power. For the imagination has reached the point at which it can perceive value in the process of growth and aging. The poetic consciousness can celebrate the loss of childhood because of the creative possibilities inherent in age; time "allows" youth and also grants adulthood, thus making it possible for the adult poet's imaginative recreation to give permanent life to the innocent glory of the child's perceptions.

The poet does not, then, seek to return to childhood or to a childhood state of mind, but rather to achieve an imaginative perception of the child's vision and to embody it in a living work of art. As the child's fresh vision transforms Fern Hill into a shining Eden, so the poet transforms both the farm and the boy's image of it into "Fern Hill." The poet's realization of his creative power, then, now enables him to achieve what the poetic consciousness of the earlier poems could not--a serene and happy poem created out of the inevitable loss of childhood.

Throughout the poem, time is imaged as a merciful, gentle, though unyielding, power. The boy is "young and easy," "green and carefree," "heedless" of time's control; he sees himself as the "lordly" "prince of the apple towns"--the monarch of his world. But time is truly the "prince." And yet, though time is in control, it still "allows" the boy's vision and joy:

Time let me hail and climb . . . .

Time let me play and be . . . .

. . . time allows  
In all his tuneful turning . . . .

And Time holds the child gently and mercifully, giving  
him freedom within limits which are as wide as the sea's:

Time let me play and be  
Golden in the mercy of his means,

Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,  
Time held me green and dying  
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

And the boy's childhood on the farm takes place "once below  
a time"--an obvious variant of the storyteller's "Once upon  
a time," a phrase which renders the timeless nature of the  
story, as it occurs at an unspecified point in time. "Once  
below a time" also images the poet's sense of the distance  
which the childish imagination perceives between himself  
and the passing of time.

The predominance of simple past tense verbs throughout  
the poem indicates the temporal distance between the poet  
and the child's experience and vision:

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs  
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,  
The night above the dingle starry,  
Time let me hail and climb  
Golden in the heydays of his eyes,  
And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns  
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves  
Trail with daisies and barley  
Down the rivers of the windfall light.

Although most verbs are in the simple past tense--a clear indication of a completed past action--there are numerous verbs in the past continuous tense, a verbal form which indicates process and movement, emphasizing the continuing, ongoing nature of the action; in stanza three alone there are five instances of this verbal mode:

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay  
 Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it  
   was air  
     And playing, lovely and watery  
             And fire green as grass.  
     And nightly under the simple stars  
 As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,  
 All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the night-jars  
     Flying with the ricks, and the horses  
             Flashing into the dark.

And in each case, the past continuous tense functions as an image of the continuity and eternality of experience which the child feels in the certain movement from day to night; every day "was running," "And playing," and always at night "the owls were bearing the farm away." The certain nature of these recurring acts is as absolute to the child as the rising and setting of sun and moon.

"I use everything & anything to make my poems work and move in the direction I want them to," Thomas wrote in 1951. "Every device there is in language is there to be used if you will."<sup>4</sup> In "Fern Hill," Thomas's mastery of the devices of language is evident. And the poem's structure, texture, and language function to further its action and to render its pattern, movement, and "direction."

Each of "Fern Hill's" six stanzas consists of two long, flowing, sparsely punctuated lines, followed by three shorter lines--with the even shorter middle one usually devoted to images of time's role in the child's life. The following two lines are parallel in length to the first two and the final two lines are again shorter. The variance in line length within each stanza creates--as it does in "The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower"--a pulsating rhythmic movement. But the rhythm is gentler, quieter than in the earlier poem, partially because the lines are generally longer and with fewer pauses and stops. These longer "running" lines image the child's perception of his life as "running" and "playing," especially in the first two stanzas, while the shorter lines in the middle of these stanzas slow the movement to reveal time's inexorable but gentle power over the "young and easy," "green and carefree," "running" and "playing" boy:

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns  
 About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,  
     In the sun that is young once only,  
     Time let me play and be  
     Golden in the mercy of his means,  
 And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves  
 Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,  
     And the sabbath rang slowly  
     In the pebbles of the holy streams.

The omnipresence of time in "Fern Hill" is rendered in terms of three distinct modes of perception in which time's process is embodied; these three modes are structurally and texturally, as well as imagistically, rendered through the

subtle movement of syntax, pausal patterns, and verbal forms. "Fern Hill's" "texture," the internal structure and pattern of these three parts, joins with its external structure to reveal the poem's truth and value.

Stanzas one and two form a structural unit, for they clearly assert time's gentle control in direct statements which are syntactically identical:

Time let me hail and climb  
Golden in the heydays of his eyes,

Time let me play and be  
Golden in the mercy of his means,

The unity of vision embodied in the "host of images" of the boy's "green," "golden," "happy" sense of his "easy" and "carefree" monarchy over his world is rendered in the sentence structure of these opening stanzas:

And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns  
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves

And green and golden, I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves  
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold

And the almost identical syntax of corresponding lines of the first two stanzas structurally emphasizes the relationship between such images:

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs  
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns  
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,

In addition, verbal repetition links these two stanzas into a unit. The first words of the first six lines of stanzas one and two, for example, are repeated exactly or with slight variation--"Now as I was" and "And as I was," "About" and "About," "The" and "In the," "Time" and "Time," "Golden" and "Golden," and "And" and "And." And this verbal repetition, coupled with syntactical identity, exemplifies the functional significance of such linguistic devices. For both the first and second stanzas are identical in imaging the child's vision of his kingdom as well as the adult's perception of time's monarchy; this unity of purpose and image, then, is furthered by the structural unity established by these linguistic devices. Also, as in the earlier poems, though with much greater clarity and ease in "Fern Hill," the repetition of syntactical and verbal modes renders the sense of continuous, repetitive process which is also rendered--in the succeeding stanzas--by the past continuous tense.

The third and fourth stanzas function as a unit which images time's workings less explicitly and with a greater emphasis on process and movement, rather than on the static control which is imaged in the first two stanzas. In the second structural unit, time's control is never directly asserted. Rather, in stanza three, the movement of time is embodied in the imagistic description of the boy's perception of the differentiation between night and day; and he sees this differentiation in terms of the variations in his own activity and experience:

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay  
 Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it  
   was air

And playing, lovely and watery

And fire green as grass.

And nightly under the simple stars

As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,

All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the night-jars

Flying with the ricks, and the horses

Flashing into the dark.

Distinctive pausal patterns render this distinction between night and day in time's process. The stanza is clearly divided by a full stop, concluding the depiction of the experience of "All the sun long," and preceding the images of sleep and dreams which occupy the child "all the moon long." The full stop thus renders the separation of day and night, which emphasizes the movement of the child from "sun" to "moon." Thus, image and pausal pattern combine to embody the repetitive and cyclical process by which time gently moves the child from day to night, from youth to age. And again, the past continuous tense images the continuity of the process. Stanza three itself, then, is an image of time's power and movement, whereas the images of stanzas one and two directly assert time's control.

The fourth stanza is also full stopped in the middle, thus relating it rhythmically and syntactically to the preceding stanza and differentiating it from stanzas one and two. For the separation of day and night in stanza three indicates a particularization of the vision rendered in stanzas one and two, in which day and night are not separated, and prepares for the moment of awakening and recreation of the farm in stanza



four. And this moment of awakening is rendered verbally in the infinitive--"And then to awake"--a verbal form with no tense or time element; the uniqueness of this form in this context thus indicates the momentary absence of time, as the child's fresh vision daily recreates the farm--brings it and himself back from night, whose birds, "the owls," "nightly," "were bearing the farm away" in the second half of stanza three.

In the child's Edenic vision, the farm is made anew each morning and time also is reborn--"And the sun grew round that very day." The timelessness imaged by the infinitive is brief, then, for creation of the farm, the sky, and the sun, is also creation of time, process, and growth. After the moment of awakening the poem shifts again to the past tense; and the imagistic description of the farm's recreation is continued to the full stop. The final half of the fourth stanza renders the poet's imaginative vision of the identity between the child's creative act and the first creation: "So it must have been after the birth of the simple light." The horses then must have walked "On to the fields of praise," and the poetic function is similar to that which the child performs, as imaged in these lines. The poet must recreate--make new--the objects of the "literal world"; he must render words fresh and "virgin" and he must celebrate and "praise" life as he creates new life in the form of his poems--he must imaginatively move "On to the fields of praise." For as Thomas's poetics assert, poetry's

"joy and function . . . is . . . the celebration of man, which is also the celebration of God," and its purpose is "praise."

Stanzas three and four, then, reveal a more personal, particular sense of time's effects on the child; for they particularize the life imaged in stanzas one and two into the movement from day to night to the moment of reawakening and creation. Stanzas three and four thus render a concrete "example," a twenty-four hour cycle, of the process which is repeated daily and nightly.

These first four stanzas are linked by the image of the child's continuing perception of his "lordly" power over his world; in stanzas three and four, when he sleeps, the farm disappears, and his awakening brings it to life again. This parallels the child's sense of his monarchy over "the apple towns" in stanza one and over the "calves" and "foxes" of stanza two. This sense of creative power is what the poet's reminiscence and recreation of childhood must teach him; he must reexperience and renew the creative ability which the child's vision gives him.

Stanzas five and six are linked as the poem's third and final structural unit; and they present a contrast to this sense of power, for they render the ultimate realization of time's inexorable control. Stanza five moves gradually to an embodiment of this awareness; it begins, in fact,

with images reminiscent of stanzas one and two, of the child's "honoured" position in his own domain, which is "new made," as stanza four reveals, each morning:

And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house  
 Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,  
     In the sun born over and over,  
         I ran my heedless ways,

But the middle of stanza five, with the words "Nothing I cared," prepares for the identical opening of stanza six, the completion of the poem, which images the end of childhood. And again, pausal patterns render the connection between the two stanzas and thus between the process imaged in both. For stanza five is the only one which ends with a very brief pause, a comma, thus moving the reader--almost without stopping--into the final moments of the poem, the depiction of time's gentle destruction of childhood, for which all of the previous images have prepared. "Time let me hail and climb," in the first stanza, for example, parallels the final image of time leading the child "up to the swallow thronged loft" in the last stanza.

And once again, as in stanza four, the verbal mode is altered; the simple past tense with the modal auxiliary "would" in stanza six emphasizes the temporal gap between the poetic act of creation in the present and the poet's perception of the child's life in the past--"Nothing I cared." This verbal form, which reveals time's act of destruction, paradoxically renders the process in terms of both the child's

and the poet's vision. To the child, unconscious of time, the end of childhood is in the future, of which he is "heedless"; to the adult consciousness, this act is in the past. And the simple past with the auxiliary "would" renders both; in terms of temporal distance, the moment meant by "would take me" lies between the past moment referred to by "Nothing I cared" and the present act of creating the poem.

The poetic imagination has thus fused three moments of time, creating, in effect, a timeless moment similar to that in which the child's vision recreates the farm in the first line of stanza four. Although time controls and destroys the child and his vision of the farm, the poem controls temporality through language and creates a permanent, timeless verbal structure which celebrates the creative possibilities inherent in the process of growth and the destruction of childhood; for time the destroyer is imaged as a gentle but firm guide, who leads the child "up." And as the child's vision "dies," so the farm--the image of Fern Hill created by his vision--disappears, in a reversal of the creation imaged in stanza four:

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would  
   take me  
 Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,  
       In the moon that is always rising,  
           Nor that riding to sleep  
       I should hear him fly with the high fields  
 And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.

The poet's act of creation is affirmative and joyous--an act of singing "praise" of life imaged in "Fern Hill's" final lines:

Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,  
Time held me green and dying  
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

## CHAPTER IV

### CELEBRATION OF NATURAL AND POETIC CREATION OF LIFE: THE BIRTHDAY POEMS

From celebration of the unity of all creation in nature's creative-destructive process, in "The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower," to celebration of the poet's creative power in the context of time's movement, in "Fern Hill," the imagination moves to celebration of the particular moments of birth and death, which represent concrete, milestone events in the process which poems such as "The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower" image.

For the poet who celebrates and praises life, a birthday is thus an event which calls for celebration of the entire process of existence, and for praise of the creation of life, of which each birthday is, traditionally, in remembrance. The birthday thus celebrates childbirth--in Thomas's poems an image of creative force--as well as the succeeding "births" of consciousness and creative power. Birthdays are celebrated as milestone moments in the individual life's ongoing process; and a birthday is a moment for recalling, re-experiencing, and celebrating past life. The poet's birthday calls, then, for celebration of self--as creative child and poet--of the journey from birth

to death, and the poetic creation of new life in death's despite. A birthday is an opportunity to celebrate the poet's bursting moments of awakening to the creative possibilities within the process of life, and in the context of time and death. The child's creation of an Edenic Fern Hill is one of these moments, and the poet's recreation of Fern Hill and the dying yet creating boy in "Fern Hill" is yet another. The poet, then, celebrates his birthday as an image of the act of creation in which he takes part as a creator of life in the form of poems.

Thomas's birthday comes in October, the season which marks the beginning of the year's autumnal decline into the barrenness of winter, an image of death. Thomas's creative imagination is so conscious of October's position in the concluding cycle of the year's life that he originally "made October trees bare" in "Poem In October" (113); he wrote to Vernon Watkins, in the letter in which he first enclosed the poem, "In the poem, I notice, on copying out, that I have made October trees bare. I'll alter later."<sup>1</sup> Although October trees are still "leaved," October is the month which marks the transition between the greenness of spring-summer and the bareness of winter. But the death of the year also marks the anniversary of the actual birth of the poet and thus also images the many "births" and awakenings of his imaginative and creative powers. And in the final two birthday poems, autumn is transformed into spring, the season of regeneration and creation. In the

celebration of his birthday, the poet renews, recreates and expands his poetic power and imaginative vision; and time and the inevitable cycle of the seasons are telescoped and unified in a single moment as the imagination perceives October as the season of both birth and death. The seasonal imagery also emphasizes time's movement of life toward death with the eternal promise of rebirth in nature's cyclical, ongoing process.

Birth also brings death to mind, for death is inevitable and is therefore implicit in the moment of birth; partly through the image of the October paradox, death is prominent in the birthday poems, though it is differently perceived and imaged in the four poems, as the poetic consciousness grows in awareness and creative power. A study of the four birthday poems reveals the poet's growth as a creator; this growth in vision is embodied in the varying structural, syntactical, and imagistic modes of rendering which these poems exemplify. For these poems, written over a period of twenty years, reveal the same movement towards greater clarity in the embodiment of the poet's expanded vision as is revealed in the movement from "I See The Boys Of Summer" to "Fern Hill." "Fern Hill" and the later birthday poems ultimately reveal that time and death are conquered by the timeless permanence of the poem.

The culmination of the imaginative vision and power which creates the poems comes in the third birthday poem,



"Poem In October," for it achieves a creative victory over the death which "Twenty-four Years" (110) emphasizes and it accomplishes the poetic goal imaged in "Especially When The October Wind" (19). Thus, the earlier birthday poems lead to the culminating celebration of "Poem In October"; and "Poem On His Birthday" (190), the final birthday celebration, recapitulates and expands the achievement of "Poem In October," for it renders the joyful acceptance of physical death, the fear and despair of which the creative imagination of "Poem In October" has transcended. A study of the birthday poems, then, inevitably focuses on the most fully realized celebration--"Poem In October."

"Especially When The October Wind," originally titled "Poem In October," celebrates the birthday of the poet by imaging the poetic act of creation of verbal structures out of the perception and experience of the "literal world." As in "The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower," the focus of "Especially When The October Wind" is on finding the voice or mode to render the experience of life's process; yet the poet's experience is limited, for he is "shut, too, in a tower of words." Unlike "The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower," then, in which the imagination perceives the unity and identity between self and the natural world, in "Especially When The October Wind" the poet is conscious of his separation from the creatures he perceives and of his "wordy" function--to embody them in verbal structures. He makes contact with

and "makes" poems "of" the women, trees, birds, and rivers by transforming them into verbal forms--"the wordy shapes of women," "the vowelled beeches" and "oaken voices," "the dark-vowelled birds," "the water's speeches." The poem's imagery thus yokes the verbal with the physical or natural--achieving identity in the context of diversity--between the "wordy" existence of the poet and the physical nature of the other living creatures which he encounters. And by imaging the trees and birds in terms of language, he also images words as living creatures, as analogues to the birds and trees. As Nature creates these creatures, so the poet's creating consciousness seeks to "make" poems out of words: "Some let me make you of the heartless words." It is also clear from the imagistic yoking of the verbal and physical that the poet's perception of the natural world is determined by his own wordy existence--locked in "a tower of words." The poet's perception of his own physical and emotional nature is also verbal:

My busy heart who shudders as she talks  
Sheds the syllabic blood and drains her words.

and, in the final lines of the poem:

The heart is drained that, spelling in the scurry  
Of chemic blood, warned of the coming fury.

The poet's act of identification, then, is not only with the organic processes of nature, but also--and more emphatically--with the creative process of making poetry.

The central verbs which express the poet's action in "Especially When The October Wind" are "make" and "tell," repeated several times; and the poem's frequently repeated incantation is to "let me make you" and "let me tell you"--in poetic forms--of the verbal-physical reality which the poetic consciousness experiences through the "tower of words":

Some let me make you of the vowelled beeches,  
 Some of the oaken voices, from the roots  
 Of many a thorny shire tell you notes,  
 Some let me make you of the water's speeches . . . .

Some let me make you of the meadow's signs;  
 The signal grass that tells me all I know  
 Breaks with the wormy winter through the eye.  
 Some let me tell you of the raven's sins . . . .

(Some let me make you of autumnal spells,  
 The spider-tongued, and the loud hill of Wales)  
 With fists of turnips punishes the land,  
 Some let me make you of the heartless words.

The poet contrasts the "burning and crested act" of creation--"I walk on fire"--with the context of death and time in which he moves and which is rendered in the "wintry" images of October; these images parallel and recall the "wintry fever" of "The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower," as they embody the dying of the year and, by extension, of the poet. In the midst of the "frosty fingers" of the chilling "October wind" which "punishes my hair," however, the poet moves "on fire" and creates timeless, verbal forms of life. Death has no dominion in this poem, and the poet ignores its threat.

The present tense of the poem evokes a sense of immediacy and reveals verbally that the poem's focus and emphasis are on the eternally present activity of encountering, rendering, and embodying life through the medium of words. In this early poem, then, the poet celebrates his birthday solely in terms of his present struggle to grow as a creator, without seeking to gain perspective by looking back to birth and childhood or forward to old age and death. This perspective and the process of self-unification must wait until the later poems, until the creative imagination has expanded and unified its vision and has found the poetic mode which can transcend the rigid, conventional stanzaic structure which marks this and all of the poems in 18 Poems (1934) and 25 Poems (1936).

In contrast to the immediacy of "Especially When The October Wind," "Twenty-four Years"--though it begins and ends in the present--looks backward from the vantage point of the poet's birthday to his birth--envisioned as the beginning of his movement through life to death. The first and final lines of the poem are in the present tense; the first line renders the poet's sense of his birthday as an appropriate vantage point from which to look backward and forward, to perceive and understand the process of life in which he partakes--"Twenty-four years remind the tears of my eyes"--of the process of life and death similar to that in "I See The Boys Of Summer"; for life is "the sensual strut,"

physical and unproductive, which the "meat-eating sun" of time devours. And man is "dressed to die" from birth in the "shroud" which birth creates. Life is thus imaged in terms of its transience and destructive power; the birthday is celebrated with "tears," for remembrance of birth brings realization of the finality of death; the poet's awareness of his creative power to conquer time and death is not yet fully realized. In contrast, in the celebration of "Poem In October," life is imaged as creative possibility; for the poem renders and embodies the imaginative act of creation.<sup>3</sup>

"Twenty-four Years" is similar in form to the Map of Love (1939) poem in which, Vernon Watkins asserts, "Dylan had already anticipated this change ["to a bare style"]." Watkins further asserts that "Both in poetry and prose his work from this time forward moved in the direction of the living voice." The poem which Watkins sees as the anticipation of change is "his short poem about Cwmdonkin Park,"<sup>4</sup> "Once It Was The Colour Of Saying" (98), and of this poem's single stanza structure, Thomas wrote to Watkins that "I see your argument about the error of shape, but the form was consistently emotional and I can't change it without a change of heart."<sup>5</sup> "Twenty-four Years"--with "Once It Was The Colour Of Saying," as well as other Map of Love poems of similar "shape" such as "O Make Me A Mask" (94), "The Spire Cranes" (95), "Not From This Anger" (99), and even "After The Funeral" (96)--marks a change in

structure and image in Thomas's Collected Poems; these poems in The Map of Love exemplify the transition period, the beginning of the movement away from the violent "conflict of warring images" in rigid, symmetrical forms--which characterizes the poems of the first half of Collected Poems--to the open forms and "easy" rhythms, the unified and unifying images and joyous tone of Thomas's last two volumes--Deaths and Entrances (1946) and In Country Sleep (1952).

"Poem In October," the third birthday poem and one of the earliest poems in Deaths and Entrances, is the first poem in the Collected Poems with this open structure and shape. Its external form is strikingly similar to that of "Fern Hill," as is its "easy" and "running" rhythm. "Poem In October" also parallels and foreshadows "Fern Hill" in its celebration of childhood; but the movement of "Poem In October" reveals even more clearly that the celebration of childhood is not an end in itself but an aspect of the celebration of the power of the creative imagination--as child and, most significantly, as poet and creator. In "Fern Hill," for example, it is chiefly the creative power of the child's vision of the farm which is celebrated. Both "Fern Hill" and "Poem In October" reveal that childhood is celebrated, then, in the context of the celebration of the poet's individuation as a creator, a maker of poems; for childhood images a mode of vision and experience and a time of creativity which the adult poet must remember and thus

reactivate and integrate into his consciousness. In a comment on "In Country Heaven," Thomas asserted the integrative possibilities of this imaginative use of memory:

The memory, in all tenses, can look towards the future, can caution and admonish. The rememberer may live himself back into active participation in the remembered scene, adventure, or spiritual condition.<sup>6</sup>

And it is this "active participation" in the process of "living back" which the poet achieves in the celebration of childhood of both "Fern Hill" and "Poem In October." Although the child in "Poem In October" is "long dead," the "truth of his joy" lives in the adult poet's "heart"; similarly, though the child's vision of Fern Hill dies when the child is led "up to the swallow thronged loft," the poet's imaginative act of creation renders the child's vision eternal, through recreation and celebration of it in the permanent form of the poem, "Fern Hill."

While "Fern Hill" focuses more heavily on the poet's imaginative recreation of the child's vision, the movement of "Poem In October" clearly renders the process of imaginative integration of adult and child and the resultant joyous celebration of the creative possibilities available to the poet. The event which calls for this celebration is the poet's thirtieth birthday, which he celebrates as he moves imaginatively between two times and weathers, through childhood and adulthood. The movement which the poem renders is both spatial and temporal; for the poem oscillates between

two times--"a child's forgotten mornings" and the morning of "my thirtieth year to heaven"--and two weathers--the "rainy autumn" of the poet's birthday and the "wonder of summer" of childhood. The poem's structure, syntax, and imagery function to emphasize and further this imaginative movement through times and weathers to the moment of unification, integration and the celebration of creative possibility. And this movement reveals the poetic process of unification with the child-self which results in an expanded unitive vision; and this enables the creative imagination to create the artifact which embodies both process and "result."

"Poem In October" consists of seven structurally identical stanzas, each with ten lines; these seven stanzas are united by a lilting and serene rhythmic pattern which moves the poem to "its own end." Thomas wrote to Vernon Watkins of the poem's rhythmic quality, that "It's got, I think, a lovely slow lyrical movement."<sup>7</sup> Thomas's emphatic concern with this "movement" is exemplified in the visual patterning of the poem on the page and by the alternation in line length which largely creates the "lovely" rhythm; this "movement" of the lines--in and out, from long to short to long to short to long--in each stanza, renders the oscillating movement of the poet between weathers and times, and from the town up to the hill. This alternation in line length is precisely accomplished; the corresponding lines of each stanza are identically constructed in terms of the number of syllables per line. In each stanza, lines one, three, and



ten consist of nine syllables; lines two, six, and seven each contain twelve syllables, except in stanza six--the one variation--in which line six contains thirteen syllables; lines four and five consist of three and five syllables respectively, while lines eight and nine reverse the pattern, containing five and three syllables respectively:

It was my thirtieth year to heaven  
 Woke to my hearing from harbour and neighbour wood  
 And the mussel pooled and the heron  
     Priested shore  
     The morning beckon  
 With water praying and call of seagull and rook  
 And the knock of sailing boats on the net webbed wall  
     Myself to set foot  
     That second  
 In the still sleeping town and set forth.

This syllabic pattern of determining line length creates, with the aid of pausal patterns, the lilting, "lyrical" rhythm and oscillating movement of the poem; and the repetition of this same syllabic pattern throughout each stanza makes them identical and thus texturally renders the identity and unity achieved in the poet's movement. It thus augments the integrative, unifying process of the poem, which culminates in the moment of unification of child and man in stanza six; it is significant, then, that stanza six is the only stanza in which the syllabic pattern is slightly altered. And it is altered by expansion--line six consists of thirteen rather than twelve syllables; the addition of this single syllable shifts the rhythmic focus to the final syllables of the line, "the truth of his joy," and these words crucially link this stanza of unification and

integration with the concluding poet's prayer in stanza seven.

The infrequent but significant pausal patterns also function to effectively further the poem's rhythmic movement, as well as to emphasize the unity of vision which is the poem's ultimate end. There are no pauses or stops to halt either the flow of images or the poet's awakening in stanza one; the only stop is the final period separating the first two stanzas and their images of the autumn morning of "my thirtieth year to heaven." Stanza two, however, has a full stop at the end of line six as well as at the conclusion of the final line; this first full stop concludes the autumn morning imagery with which the poem opens, and emphasizes the poet's movement:

And I rose  
 In rainy autumn  
 And walked abroad in a shower of all my days.

The concluding four lines of stanza two, set apart by the full stop, depict the poet's movement out of the town, an extension and elaboration of the movement of setting forth which closes stanza one:

High tide and the heron dived when I took the road  
                   Over the border  
                   And the gates  
 Of the town closed as the town awoke.

The partial stop in the exact middle of stanza three emphasizes the position which the poet has reached "On the

hill's shoulder"; similarly, the end stop concluding the stanza's final line emphasizes the image of the poet's elevated vantage point, from which he can see "the wood faraway under me." And the division of the stanza in half separates the "summery" images in the first five lines from the predominantly autumnal images of the second half of the stanza:

A springful of larks in a rolling  
 Cloud and the roadside bushes brimming with whistling  
 Blackbirds and the sun of October  
     Summery  
     On the hill's shoulder,  
 Here were fond climates and sweet singers suddenly  
 Come in the morning where I wandered and listened  
     To the rain wringing  
     Wind blow cold  
 In the wood faraway under me.

The stanza thus marks a transitional moment, for its two parallel halves--separated by a comma--image the two weathers between which the poetic consciousness moves, and this single stanza thus compresses the autumnal and summery images of the other six stanzas.

The first seven lines of stanza four continue this dual description of the two weathers; and the full stop, which separates these first seven lines from the concluding three lines of the stanza, marks the end of this imagistic transition between the present autumn of stanzas one and two and the past summer of stanzas five and six. And in the last three lines of stanza four, the first movement of the weather occurs:

There could I marvel  
     My birthday  
 Away but the weather turned around.

Following the weather's turning, stanzas five and six image the poet's imaginative recreation of childhood's summer and his unification with the "long dead" child's vision and "truth." As in stanza one, there is no internal punctuation in stanza five, rendering its movement flowing and apparently ceaseless; in addition, stanza five is the only stanza which is not end stopped and the movement of the lines--with the repetition of "And" from the last line of stanza five to the first line of stanza six--continues, linking the two stanzas together as a unit. The full stop at the end of the second line of stanza six emphasizes the imagistic and syntactical connection between these two lines and the final half of stanza five:

And I saw in the turning so clearly a child's  
 Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother  
     Through the parables  
     Of sun light  
 And the legends of the green chapels

And the twice told fields of infancy  
 That his tears burned my cheeks and his heart moved in mine.

This full stop also emphasizes the moment of unification which the second line of stanza six images, for the period halts the long, flowing movement begun in stanza five and focuses the eye and breath on the integration of man and boy: "That his tears burned my cheeks and his heart moved in mine."

The final three lines of stanza six are also set apart between the full stop after line seven and the end stop after line ten--pointing to the imaginative movement from the creative boy and man--the "I" and "he" in the first seven lines--to "the mystery" with which, the images and verbal repetition render, the imaginations of both boy and man are in tune.

And the mystery  
Sang alive  
Still in the water and singingbirds.

The poem's concluding stanza, which unifies the central image patterns of the poem, is the most heavily punctuated, containing four full stops. The opening line and a half repeat the concluding two lines of the fourth stanza and are separated from the rest of the stanza by a full stop; and, as in stanza four, these lines render the movement, or "turning" of the weather:

And there could I marvel my birthday  
Away but the weather turned around.

And the succeeding two and a half lines, amplifying the images of stanza six, embody the poet's renewal of the child's vision:

And the true  
Joy of the long dead child sang burning  
In the sun.

The next three lines are also set apart by a full stop, as they image the unification of the two modes of creative

perception in terms of the imaginative unification of the two times, the two weathers, and the two spatial positions of hill and town:

It was my thirtieth  
Year to heaven stood there then in the summer noon  
Though the town below lay leaved with October blood.

And the poem concludes with the poet's three-line prayer for continuation of his creative process:

O may my heart's truth  
Still be sung  
On this high hill in a year's turning.

The four full stops in the final stanza thus emphasize the imaginative experiences which the poem's images render and which the amplification and repetition of the central image patterns serve to unify.

The significant fact about "Poem In October" is that it moves; and the poem's imagistic movement renders the movement of the creative and creating imagination. The images depict the poet's imaginative movement through two times and two weathers, from town to hill, from morning to noon, through two modes of imaginative perception and creation to final unification and the promise of further creative growth in the next year's "turning." The poem is itself an image of this movement, for its central "host of images" moves and grows throughout the poem, thus moving the poem to "its own end," in tune with the singing rhythm and the visual shape of pulsating movement.

The complex of weather images embodies the poet's imaginative birthday movement; this process begins with a statement which establishes the time and also images the poet's movement through life--"It was my thirtieth year to heaven"--and this statement prepares for the poem's constant movement. This implied movement in time--"to heaven"--parallels the poet's imaginative movement in the poem, which is embodied in the "turning" of the weathers. The shift from autumn to spring and summer images the imaginative, spatial movement--from town to hill--and his imaginative, temporal movement--from his "thirtieth year" to imaginative re-experience of childhood. The poem's first two stanzas render the poet's perception of the harbour and "still sleeping town" in the autumn morning of "my thirtieth year to heaven." And it is from this place and this weather that the poem begins its process. Stanza one begins as the poet awakes--"Woke to my hearing"--and ends as:

Myself to set foot  
                   That second  
 In the still sleeping town and set forth.

Stanza two recapitulates the weather of "rainy autumn" and the poet's movement out of it:

And I rose  
                   In rainy autumn  
 And walked abroad in a shower of all my days.

The October rain recalls the past, and the movement through the "rainy autumn" is thus also a movement through "a shower of all my days." The poet moves out of the town as the

town begins to "move" to life--

when I took the road  
Over the border  
And the gates  
Of the town closed as the town awoke.

Thus, as the poet moves forward, out of the town's renewed life and up to the "summery" hill, he moves back into the renewed, imaginatively recreated summer of childhood.

Stanzas three and four image this movement, the transition from the town to the hill and from the "rainy autumn" of stanzas one and two to the "spring and summer" of stanzas five and six. Stanza three renders the movement up to "the hill's shoulder"; and here autumn is imaged as "summery":

and the sun of October  
Summery  
On the hill's shoulder,

where "fond climates" contrast with

the rain wringing  
Wind blow cold  
In the wood faraway under me.

And stanza four continues this perception of the October weather--in the harbour--the "pale rain over the dwindling harbour"--and in the town--"over the sea wet church the size of a snail"--from the elevated vantage point of the hill; from this high place, the poet can also perceive that "all the gardens/Of spring and summer were blooming."



This union of summer and autumn in stanzas three and four prepares for the moment at the end of stanza four when "the weather turned around," and the poet's imagining recreates childhood's "wonder of summer." This "turning" of the year's temporal cycle, rendered in the poem's last line, and recalls the poet's temporal movement "to heaven," stated in the opening line and repeated in the closing stanza.

The poet's imaginative vision of childhood's fruited "wonder of summer," the ceremonious holiness of its

parables  
Of sun light  
And the legends of the green chapels  
And the twice told fields of infancy

leads to a reawakening of the child, paralleling the awakening of the adult poet in the first two stanzas; and the "boy/in the listening/Summertime of the dead" is revived within the adult's poetic consciousness. The boy's summertime and the "truth of his joy" become actively integrated, in stanzas six and seven, into the adult poet's "heart's truth"; though "the weather turned around" again, the poet has integrated into his creative consciousness "the true/Joy of the long dead child." And the renewal in the man of the boy's vision is imaged, in stanza seven, by the unification in the poet's perception of the two weathers; both summer and autumn, town and hill, are comprehended in the poet's unitive vision:

It was my thirtieth  
 Year to heaven stood there then in the summer noon  
 Though the town below lay leaved with October blood.

This "host" of weather images moves and grows throughout the poem by repetition, amplification, and compression. The "rainy autumn" of stanza two, for example, is amplified and particularized in "the rain wringing/Wind" of stanza three and the "Pale rain over the dwindling harbour/And over the sea wet church the size of a snail" in stanza four. The expansion of the image also renders the poet's expanded vision as he moves up to the hill's "shoulder" and looks down on the "dwindling" town and harbour. Within the "gates" of the town in stanza two, he perceives himself in the rain and sees its relationship to his own "shower of all my days"; but his vision is widened as he separates himself from the town and begins his imaginative spatial movement. In stanzas three and four, then, the imagination looks upon the rain-drenched harbour and town from a personal as well as a spatial distance. In contrast, the "springful of larks in a rolling/Cloud" and the "sun of October/summery" in the first half of stanza three are generalized to "fond climates and sweet singers" in the second half of this transitional stanza. And the "springful of larks" is compressed, in stanza four, in the repetitive image "the lark full cloud." In relationship with this image is an amplified and expanded image of the "summery" sun and "fond climates"; for in stanza four,

"all the gardens/Of spring and summer were blooming in the tall tales." This amplification of "summery" reflects the poet's movement towards childhood's "wonder of summer," a generalized image which itself recalls the earlier "summery" images, while emphasizing the sense of "wonder" which "tall tales" introduces in stanza four.

Further amplification of the image of summer's "tall tales" occurs in the images of the child's vision in stanza five, which also contain and expand the image of the "summery" sun from the preceding stanzas:

Through the parables  
                   Of sun light  
 And the legends of the greenchapels  
 And the twice told fields of infancy

Such images are also reminiscent of "Especially When The October Wind," for they--with "the tall tales" of spring and summer--reveal the poetic perception of the natural world in images which the verbal mode of creating evokes.

The function of the birds as a unifying link between poet and nature, and as an image of the poet's function, also recalls the earlier poem in October, "Especially When The October Wind," while it points to "Over Sir John's Hill" (187). But the sinning ravens of "Especially When The October Wind" have been transformed into the priestly herons and "sweet singers" of "Poem In October." The bird images ultimately move to unify both poet and child with nature's

"turning" process, for an imagistic analogy between poet, boy and birds is created in the poem's movement. And this analogy renders both the poet's function as a singer and his role as embodier of the "mystery" and ceremony of nature's truth.

From the beginning of the poem, the poet is imagistically related to the birds; in stanza one he responds to "the call of seagull and rook" and wakes and moves from the town. And in stanza two, the poet's birthday celebration is begun by the birds:

My birthday began with the water-  
Birds and the birds of the winged trees flying my name

And as the poet moves out of the town and up to the hill, "the heron dived," a parallel yet contrasting action which expands both the sense of the poet's movement and his connection with the birds of the harbour and town.

The "springful of larks" and the "whistling blackbirds" are the "sweet singers" of stanza three; and the poet and boy of stanzas six and seven are also "sweet singers" of "truth" and "joy." The image of the birds as bearers of nature's "mystery" begins in stanza one, in which both birds and water are linked, in imagery which emphasizes their role in nature's ceremony. In stanza one the shore is "heron priested" and the water is "praying"; and in stanza six, these images are amplified, and the birds and water become the repositories of the truth of the living "mystery":

And the mystery  
 Sang alive  
 Still in the water and singingbirds.

Stanzas six and seven also verbally link the boy and the poet with the "singingbirds," for as the birds sing the "mystery" of nature, so "the true/Joy of the long dead child sang burning/In the sun"; and the poet concludes his birthday by praying for continuation of the same creative power of singing celebration:

O may my heart's truth  
 Still by sung  
 On this high hill in a year's turning.

This imagistic connection is partially rendered through verbal repetition, which functions throughout the poem to further emphasize the poet's and the poem's movement. The use of "singers," "sang," "singing," and "sung" to refer to the birds, the boy, and the poet thus links the images together and renders the analogy. In a similar linking, the linguistic and denotative resemblance between "hearing" and "listening" unites the adult's experience with the child's, which he imaginatively recalls; in stanza one, the poet "Woke to my hearing from harbour and neighbour wood," and in stanza six, "a boy/In the listening/Summertime of the dead whispered the truth of his joy." Thus, the linguistic similarity emphasizes the imagination's achievement of unification of the poet with his child-self; for it reveals the same creative experience in the two weathers and times.

The use of verbal repetition in the final two stanzas concludes the unification of the child's vision with the poet's; the word "truth" links "the truth of his joy," which images the boy's sense of "mystery" in stanza six, with "my heart's truth," the imaginative vision which the poet prays may "still be sung/On this high hill in a year's turning." And the movement from "truth of his joy" to "mystery" to "the true/Joy of the long dead child" to "my heart's truth" linguistically renders the gradual movement of the poem's act of identification and unification--from perception of the boy's "truth" to integration of it with the poet's "heart's truth."

And finally, the poem's dominant movement word--"turning"--concludes the poem, as it has marked the shifts between times and weathers throughout the poem--"the weather turned around" at the end of stanza four, and the poet's imaginative vision "saw in the turning so clearly a child's/Forgotten mornings." The poet's imaginative creation of the "turning" of time and weather in this experience expands his perception of time's "turning" process. Thus he can conclude his joyous poem with a prayer which reveals the realization that his timeless imaginative creations--the poems which embody "my heart's truth"--can only be made in the context of time. The prayer--and thus the poem--conclude with the word "turning," imaging time, movement and process, and emphasizing the creative possibilities inherent in an imaginative life which is lived within the confines of time.

The fact that "Poem In October"--written entirely in the past tense--concludes with a future-oriented prayer, emphasizes the ongoing, continuing process of life and of the poet's creative act. The sense of ceremony, of ritual celebration and praise--which is present in the images of the "heron/Priested shore," the "water praying," the "parables/Of sun light/And the legends of the green chapels"--is augmented by this prayer form. For the poet's birthday is experienced as a ceremonious day of celebration, and singing the "truth" of the poet's vision and creative act is itself a form of prayer and "praise" of all creation.

The final birthday celebration, "Poem On His Birthday," continues this "praise" of self and creation through similar images. Again, as in "Poem In October," the poet "prays" that he may both "mourn by the shrined/And druid herons' vows/The voyage to ruin I must run," and also praise life and "Count my blessings aloud." In contrast to "Twenty-four Years," the poet's thirty-fifth birthday celebration joyfully images his triumphant journey to death--"As I sail out to die"--as he counts his blessings--"Four elements and five/Senses, and man a spirit in love." And he praises above all the creative powers which he has shared with nature. From within "the hewn coils of his trade" he "perceives" and renders his vision of life and death; for it is the poet's imaginative vision which sees the sun bloom, which transforms autumn to "thunderclap spring," and which creates,

out of this vision, timeless, "shining" poems:

And this last blessing most,

That the closer I move

To death, one man through his sundered hulks,  
 The louder the sun blooms  
 And the tusked, ramshackling sea exults;  
 And every wave of the way  
 And gale I tackle, the whole world then,  
 With more triumphant faith  
 Than ever was since the world was said,  
 Spins its morning of praise,

I hear the bouncing hills  
 Grow larked and greener at berry brown  
 Fall and the dew larks sing  
 Taller this thunderclap spring, and how  
 More spanned with angels ride  
 The mansouled fiery islands! Oh,  
 Holier then their eyes,  
 And my shining men no more alone  
 As I sail out to die.

The personal movement of "Poem On His Birthday" is from detachment to relationship; the poet is "he" until stanza nine in which the creative imagination becomes "I" as he begins to "count my blessings aloud," in praise of life. As in "Poem In October," the vantage point from which the poet imaginatively experiences and celebrates his birthday is elevated--he is "high among beaks," and he sees the creatures of nature "Under and round him go." Yet the complex and vital creative action of "Poem In October" is absent from this quieter, more resigned poem; in "Poem On His Birthday," the imagination does not move through its world and into its process but tries to expand its vision by reaching up from the "switchback sea" and the "house on stilts" to abstract realms of speculation:



And freely no good lost  
 In the unknown, famous light of great  
 And fabulous, dear God.  
 Dark is a way and light is a place,  
 Heaven that never was  
 Nor will be ever is always true,

The poem concludes with the image of impending death, which marks the conclusion of the "blessings" of imaginative power and act which have made the sun bloom. The poem's joy comes from the realization that the products of the creative imagination live forever; but the joy of future creation--which ends "Poem In October"--is missing. In this regard, "Poem On His Birthday" represents an antithetical movement from "Poem In October," for "Poem On His Birthday" moves towards the conclusion rather than towards the increase of imaginative power and the continuation of the creative act. It is a poem--however joyful--of endings rather than of beginnings; in contrast to "Poem In October," it celebrates the birthday as an image of the cessation of poetic activity, rather than as a creative moment in the process of life in which the imagination's power transcends the inevitability of death and moves beyond it to future creation of poems in the next "year's turning."

## CHAPTER V

### CELEBRATION OF POETIC CREATION OF LIFE OUT OF THE ENCOUNTER WITH DEATH: THE IMAGINATION'S "REFUSAL TO MOURN"

As the birthday of the poet is an event which calls for poetic recreation of the life of "the long dead child" and celebration of life's movement and process, so the poet's encounter with death--of an aged man, a child in London, a beloved and honoured father, an aunt in Wales--calls not for mourning, but for celebration of the imagination's life-giving, creative power within time's "turning" movement. Like the birthday, the events of death and funeral are moments in the process of life which focus awareness on the creative-destructive process of existence, which leads to death; for the poetic consciousness, these events also call for celebration of this process and of the imagination's power to conquer death through the creation of timeless, permanent poems of "praise." For out of the encounter with death, the poet creates new life in the form of a poem; and the poem structurally and imagistically renders the continuity of existence and the reality of immortality in nature's context.

The most successful of the poems which embody the encounter with death reveal in their images and structure the poet's imaginative act of transformation and creation--by which the experience of death becomes a moment of transcendent

affirmation of life. One of the most fully realized celebrations, within the context of death, of the eternality of life and of the poet's creative power, is "A Refusal To Mourn The Death, By Fire, Of A Child In London" (112). The image and structure of other poems, such as "The Tombstone Told When She Died" (102), "Among Those Killed In The Dawn Raid Was A Man Aged A Hundred" (152), "And Death Shall Have No Dominion" (77), "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" (128), and "After The Funeral" (96), which focus on death and celebrate the creative powers of life, point to the unifying, "unmourning" ceremony of "A Refusal To Mourn The Death, By Fire, Of A Child In London." And the creative achievement of this ceremonious celebration points to the most nearly perfect achievement of the fully unified imagination--"Ceremony After A Fire Raid" (143), in which the loving act of the imagination creates "glory" and ceremony out of destruction.

In the final lines of "The Tombstone Told When She Died," the young woman's experience of death, as the poet imagines it, is imaged as a moment of childbirth; the continuity of life's process, the organic link between birth and death, are rendered here, as throughout the earlier poems, in anatomical images, in the connection between "womb" and "tomb":

I died before bedtime came  
 But my womb was bellowing  
 And I felt with my bare fall  
 A blazing red harsh head tear up  
 And the dear floods of his hair.

This final image embodies in physical, organic terms, the perception that death, as a moment in life's process, can be a creative experience. And Thomas wrote to Vernon Watkins of the poem that "I wanted the girl's terrible reaction to orgasmic [sic] death to be suddenly altered into a kind of despairing love."<sup>1</sup> And this union of death and birth, and the transformation of terror into love, renders the poem's embodiment of the unity of the processes of life and the redemption from death in the birth of new life.

The final lines of "Among Those Killed In The Dawn Raid Was A Man Aged A Hundred" also image birth, but without the "bellowing" anatomical imagery of the earlier poems. The poetic consciousness achieves an image of birth out of death which is joyous and bright:

The morning is flying on the wings of his age  
And a hundred storks perch on the sun's right hand.

The language throughout renders birth and vitality--"morning," "flying," "storks," "sun"--as the imagination envisions the old man's death as a time-stopping moment of creation and rebirth; and the poem's depiction of the moment of death also images and eternalizes this sense of its creativity:

Tell his street on its back he stopped a sun  
And the craters of his eyes grew springshoots and fire  
When all the keys shot from the locks, and rang.

The creative continuity of life, which is embodied in these images, is also rendered in the structure of "And Death

Shall Have No Dominion" and "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night." The repetition of "And death shall have no dominion" at the beginning and end of each stanza reflects the organic unity and the circular movement of life's process. The poem's structure thus visually reflects the affirmation of life's ongoing process and the eternality of life which the images render:

And death shall have no dominion . . . .  
 Though they go mad they shall be sane,  
 Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;  
 Though lovers be lost love shall not;  
 And death shall have no dominion . . . .

And death shall have no dominion . . . .  
 Though they be mad and dead as nails,  
 Heads of the characters hammer through daisies:  
 Break in the sun till the sun breaks down,  
 And death shall have no dominion.

The use of the connective "And" further emphasizes the eternal, ongoing nature of the process and the living connection between death and life--for there is no beginning and no end to the unchanging reality of life, the "eternal movement behind" the poem--"Though lovers be lost love shall not." The poem itself is thus an image of creation and of the continuing process of life and death which is its subject. For the poem's structure is circular; the last line leads back to the first as the poet's imaginative experience of death leads to affirmation of life.

The structure of "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" is the rigid, intellectually controlled, conventional

villanelle, a form which is

characterized by nineteen lines divided into five tercets and a final four-line stanza, and the presence of only two rimes . . . . Line 1 is repeated entirely to form lines 6, 12, and 18, and line 3 is repeated entirely to form lines 9, 15, and 19: thus eight of the nineteen lines are refrain.<sup>2</sup>

While Thomas adheres to this rigid form, he also expands its poetic possibilities; for he rejects its "idyllic, delicate, simple, and slight" qualities.<sup>3</sup> In "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night," the villanelle is instead a structure which expresses passion in strong, evocative words and images:

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night . . . .

And you, my father, there on the sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

The villanelle structure of this poem exemplifies Thomas's attempt to revitalize traditional poetic forms;<sup>4</sup> this revitalization through language and image parallels and comes out of Thomas's similar attempt to render words "virgin." Like words, forms such as the villanelle must also be renewed and returned to their original pristine beauty and expressive power by the imagination's ability to create life out of death--to renew stale, old forms which can then "serve my imaginative purpose." The villanelle form thus does not

portray a traditional pastoral scene,<sup>5</sup> but rather embodies the poet's plea to his dying father to retain the obstinacy and passion of his life in the face of death. Thus, the poem "strides on two levels";<sup>6</sup> in contrast to the tone and imagery of "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night," which reveal a violent, urgent resistance to this particular death, the repetition which characterizes the villanelle form images the continuing repetitive, creative-destructive process of life, in which death is but a single moment. The poem's structure thus reveals an affirmation of the process which enables the poet, by his "burning and crested act" of creating the poem to make the experience of this death a creative moment which celebrates vitality and passion.

The poem which is created out of the encounter with death embodies not only the poetic vision of the process of life and death, but also images the poet's imaginative function in the context of death. The poet's role is to create; his duty and function as a poet are not to mourn, but to celebrate.

Thus, in "After the Funeral," the poetic consciousness images his own act of celebration and "memorial":<sup>7</sup>

I stand, for this memorial's sake, alone  
In the snivelling hours with dead, humped Ann

The "service" of "Ann's bard" comes "After the funeral" and celebrates both Ann's "love" and the ceremony of nature's

creatures, which the poet calls to his service of praise:

But I, Ann's bard on a raised hearth, call all  
The seas to service that her wood-tongued virtue  
Babble like a bellbuoy over the hymning heads,  
Bow down the walls of the ferned and foxy woods  
That her love sing and swing through a brown chapel,  
Bless her bent spirit with four, crossing birds.

And the creative imagination also celebrates its own act of love, rendered in "the hewn voice" of the "memorial" ceremony, in the poem which is a living monument to Ann; for the poet's act creates the poem in praise of Ann's life and in affirmation of the creative process which enables him to transform her death to new life:

These cloud-sopped, marble hands, this monumental  
Argument of the hewn voice, gesture and psalm,  
Storm me forever over her grave until  
The stuffed lung of the fox twitch and cry Love  
And the strutting fern lay seeds on the black sill.

The poet, whose function is to affirm life's creative process and his own role as "bard" and creator, refuses "to mourn the death, by fire, of a child in London." Rather, the poetic consciousness seeks to enter imaginatively into the ceremony of nature, to imitate nature's "unmourning" process of creation and destruction and thus honor the "majesty" of the child's death with his own praise and affirmation. In "A Refusal To Mourn The Death, By Fire, Of A Child In London," in contrast to "After The Funeral," the poet does not "call" upon Nature's creatures to join in his "service," but rather seeks to imaginatively enter into



nature's ceremony. The poetic consciousness in "A Refusal To Mourn The Death, By Fire, Of A Child In London" transcends the differentiation and separation from nature which are emphasized in the focus on "I, Ann's bard" in "After The Funeral"; rather, "A Refusal To Mourn The Death, By Fire, Of A Child In London" moves into identification with nature's ceremony and achieves the unitive vision and celebration which the later "Ceremony After A Fire Raid" most fully embodies.

The structure and imagery of "A Refusal To Mourn The Death, By Fire, Of A Child In London" succeed in rendering the poet's "unmourning" celebration and movement to unification. The poem's first three stanzas consist of assertions of the poet's "refusal to mourn"; and the final stanza celebrates the child's return to life's creative source--the ongoing process celebrated in "And Death Shall Have No Dominion"--and images the unitive relationship between the poet's and nature's "refusal to mourn." The triadic structure of the "refusal to mourn" is separated into two sentences. In stanzas one and two and line one of stanza three, the poet's statement that "Never until/ . . . the still hour/Is come// . . . Shall I . . . mourn//The majesty and burning of the child's death" is elaborated by modifying images in an adjectival structure; thus the direct statement is expanded and amplified by the images:

Never until the mankind making  
 Bird beast and flower  
 Fathering and all humbling darkness  
 Tells with silence the last light breaking  
 And the still hour  
 Is come of the sea tumoling in harness

And I must enter again the round  
 Zion of the water bead  
 And the synagogue of the ear of corn  
 Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound  
 Or sow my salt seed  
 In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn

The majesty and burning of the child's death.

The poem's movement is from entrance into nature's ceremony and the resultant "refusal to mourn" to the final affirmation and celebration achieved through the ceremonious process of the poem. This movement of the creative imagination is rendered in the central "host of images." The poem's images embody the relationship of the poet to the ritual ceremony of nature, which he must "enter again," both at his own death and at the final day of the "last light," and which he now seeks to imitate in honor of the child's death. The "round/Zion of the water bead/And the synagogue of the ear of corn" in stanza two image the holiness of nature's ceremony in the context of traditional religious ceremony--the "bead" and the "synagogue" are linked to earth's life-giving water and grain. And the "salt seed" of the poet is linked to the traditional "sackcloth." In the final stanza these images recur, in the rendering of the child's return to nature:

Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,  
 Robed in the long friends,  
 The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,

Secret by the unmourning water  
Of the riding Thames.

The "unmourning water/Of the riding Thames" images nature's process and movement with which the poetic consciousness identifies and unites. And his refusal "to mourn//The majesty and burning of the child's death" is thus linked imagistically and linguistically to nature's "unmourning water"; for it is this ceremonious process--"the round/Zion of the water bead"--in which the poet engages. Like nature, the poetic consciousness does not mourn. Rather, it imitates nature as it continues, like the Thames, the action of "riding," moving, and creating. In the same way, the "grains beyond age"--the eternal fertility of the earth of which the child becomes a part--are related to the "grains" of "the synagogue of the ear of corn," the other creative element of nature's ritual which the poet must experience. Although the "bard" calls nature to his own memorial service for Ann Jones, the creating imagination of "A Refusal To Mourn The Death, By Fire, Of A Child In London" enters into the creative ceremony of nature in order to celebrate the "majesty and burning of the child's death"; for it is an event calling for celebration of life's process rather than the blasphemy of elegy, which is incapable of embodying the "mankind of her going":

I shall not murder  
The mankind of her going with a grave truth  
Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath  
With any further  
Elegy of innocence and youth.

Unlike the first two stanzas, the second statement of the intention not to mourn is directly asserted, in stanza three, in a straightforward form without the images of the ceremony into which the poet has entered in stanzas one and two. Yet the language of stanza three recalls that of stanzas one and two, indicating the poet's increasing absorption in nature's ceremony as it links this second statement to the imagery of the first. "Blaspheme," "stations of the breath" (recalling the stations of the cross), and "elegy" are connotatively linked to the words which image religious ritual in stanza two--"Zion," "bead," "synagogue," and "sackcloth"; the poet's statement in the third stanza thus implies that such ritual is inadequate to deal with the "majesty and burning" inherent in the death of the child's "innocence and youth." Only when these traditional religious forms are experienced in the context of the ceremonious, creative ritual of nature are they appropriate. "The mankind of her going" is also related verbally to "the mankind making" source of life imaged in stanza one; and this relationship further indicates that the child's death must be perceived and celebrated within the context of life's creative-destructive process, imaged in the first stanza. For "darkness" is, paradoxically, the creative source of both light and life; darkness makes mankind and fathers "Bird beast and flower":

. . . . the mankind making  
 Bird beast and flower  
 Fathering and all humbling darkness

Throughout the first three stanzas, the emphasis is on the poet's ceremonious act of celebration and creation, on his "refusal to mourn." The pronoun "I," as the subject of the imagistic statements of stanzas one, two, and three, renders this focus on the poet's response to the death and on his own function in its context. The final stanza, in contrast, imagistically renders the organic unity of all of nature's creatures in the image of the dead child who has returned to the creative and creating earth and water. And, significantly, the "I" has disappeared as the poet verbally identifies his own refusal to mourn with that of nature's "unmourning water." Out of this unity, the final line of the poem makes the poem's final affirmation; through the ceremonious process of the poem's movement, the creative consciousness comes to recognize and accept the fact of death, for it is imaginatively perceived in the context of the immortality of life's repetitive, ongoing creative-destructive process: "After the first death, there is no other."

## CHAPTER VI

### UNITIVE VISION--THE ULTIMATE CELEBRATION; "CEREMONY AFTER A FIRE RAID"

The unifying imaginative movement of "A Refusal To Mourn The Death, By Fire, Of A Child In London" from death and fiery destruction to life and creation of poetic celebration is surpassed by "Ceremony After A Fire Raid"; the act of the imagination rendered in "A Refusal To Mourn The Death, By Fire, Of A Child In London" is identical to that embodied in the triadic structure of "Ceremony After A Fire Raid," yet in the earlier poem the final act of unification--marked by the disappearance of the "I"--is not as fully realized as it is in the "ultimate celebration";<sup>1</sup> the ceremonious "glory" of part three of "Ceremony After A Fire Raid" "really is a Ceremony, and the third part of the poem is the music at the end."<sup>2</sup> And the "Ceremony" moves through three distinct yet unified parts "into" the poetic creation of this "music at the end." The structural division of "Ceremony After A Fire Raid" into three sections, marked by roman numerals, clearly shows that three distinct experiences exist in the process of the poem's movement from destruction to creation, from the grief of part one to the praise and celebration of part three, from the chaos of the "fire raid" to the order and pattern of art in the "ceremony." And these three parts exist in a living, organic

relationship--for each is an essential, active moment within this formative process.

The poem's three parts render its movement in the context of three modes of encountering the senses' experience of the fire raid--emotional, rational, and imaginative; each of these three levels of response to the experience renders the attempt to achieve unity with life's process and thus to purge grief and become able to celebrate. Although the desire for unity is present in the structure and image of the first two parts, the emotional and rational modes are unable to achieve it individually; the process must be completed and all three modes must be experienced. The poem can then conclude with the imaginative transcending of death and chaos and the transformation of the experience into art by the creation of the "ceremony" in celebration of "The sundering ultimate kingdom of genesis' thunder."

The poem begins with the emotional response to the senses' perception of the fire raid. And the action of part one renders the purging of the overpowering emotion of grief, which is the initial response to death and which is embodied in the opening stanza of the poem:

Myselfes  
The grievers  
Grieve  
Among the street burned to tireless death  
A child of a few hours

From this grief and mourning for the dead child, the emotional

consciousness moves to an attempt at ceremonious mourning through song and celebration of the process in which the child's death must be experienced; thus part one offers an emotional preparation for the ultimate "music at the end":

Begin  
With singing  
Sing  
Darkness kindled back into beginning.

Yet this second stanza nevertheless ends with a return to the grief of stanza one--"Myselfs grieve now, and miracles cannot atone"; for the "singing," an emotional form of celebration, cannot purge grief. But the emotional perception--necessarily inadequate--of the "centuries of the child" and of the child's place in the context of life moves the emotional consciousness to take on not only grief but the burden of guilt, as "myselfs" pray for forgiveness; for all creation is involved in the death:

Forgive  
Us forgive  
Us your death that myselfs the believers  
May hold it in a great flood  
Till the blood shall spurt,  
And the dust shall sing like a bird  
As the grains blow, as your death grows, through our heart

The grieving, singing, and praying of the emotional consciousness cannot, however, attain unity with the child and the reality of death within nature's process. Thus, in the final stanza of part one, in which the "chant"--a combination of song and prayer--continues, the multiple speaker moves finally to the ultimate emotional expression



of grief; and grief is thus purged--by tears:

Crying  
Your dying  
Cry,  
Child beyond cockcrow . . . .

The possible emotional responses thus are exhausted in the movement of part one from grieving to singing to praying to crying. This final purging of grief through crying leads to the emotional apprehension of the redeeming and creative power of love in the conclusion of part one--"Love is the last light spoken." Although the child's creative and creating possibilities are destroyed--"Seed of sons in the loin of the black husk left"--creation and love are eternal.

From the emotional expression of grief in part one, the poem moves, in part two, into the intellectual effort of the reflective consciousness to understand--to "know"--the value and function of this death in the context of metaphysical knowledge about life. The cognitive function of mind moves the two longer stanzas of part two through reflection, memory, logic, and questioning; thus the reflective consciousness seeks to comprehend the significance of the child's death in relationship to the cosmic scheme of human existence and to the first fall and death:

I know not whether  
Adam or Eve, the adorned holy bullock  
Or the white ewe lamb  
Or the chosen virgin  
Laid in her snow  
On the altar of London,  
Was the first to die

In the cinder of the little skull . . . .

The action of part two is this quest to "know" and to create, out of this knowledge, "my service"; but the "service" of the reflective consciousness, like the mourning of the emotional selves, is inadequate to deal with the cosmic mystery of "Beginning crumbled back to darkness," of the relationship between creation and destruction. For the association between "the garden of Eden" and "the garden of wilderness," between "Adam and Eve together" and "the one/Child," is a cognitive association, rather than a unitive vision of the underlying reality of relationship. But the reflective mode is essential in the process of achieving the unitive condition; the significance of the experience is made more comprehensible by this reflective process, for it establishes a larger human context for this single death. A partial explanation of this death is thus possible in the knowledge that all creatures die; and the process of reflecting on the first fall and death provides, in part two, a sense of the continuity of existence, from the first "Man and woman undone" to the "chosen virgin" who lies dead "On the altar of London."

After the emotion of grief is purged and the significance of the event is rationally analyzed, the poem's final and culminating movement is the imaginative act of entering "into" unity and identity with all existence and with life's process of creation and destruction. In this imaginative

act of union--rendered in the repetition of "into," which embodies the imagination's movement--the grief which is emotionally experienced in part one is transmuted into the celebration and praise of the ceremony in part three. As the imagination becomes one with all life by diffusing and entering wholly "into" the world, it is able to metamorphose the agony and chaos of death into celebration of life through the pattern and order of art; it moves "Into the organpipes and steeples," then "Into the bread . . . /Into the wine" and creates "Glory glory glory," in celebration and joyous praise of "The sundering ultimate kingdom of genesis' thunder."

The functions or forms of mind--emotion, reason, and imagination--and the patterns and forms of art, are the means through which fire is transformed into art. The ceremony is achieved through the process of the poem's movement through the emotional, cognitive, and imaginative responses to the experience of the child's death; and the "fire raid," which the senses initially perceive as totally destructive, is transformed by the poem into a transcendent experience of "glory."

The poem's movement from emotional and intellectual apprehension to imaginative unification also re-enacts the process by which the unitive condition--of mind and vision--is achieved. This unitive condition is essential for the accomplishment of the creative act; in rendering this achievement the poem's movement thus enacts the process by which the poetic consciousness becomes empowered to create

the poem. The poem therefore renders the process of its own formation. For the vital experience of the three modes of encountering the crucial event, the active realization of their essential interrelationship and of the necessity for full expression of each, leads to their ultimate unification--the creation of the unitive condition. And this unitive condition, the necessary prerequisite of artistic creation, is embodied in the ceremony of part three. Thus, the "Ceremony After A Fire Raid" is both process and product, "enquiry" and "result." The poem reveals its reality and value by revealing the unitive creative act, by showing, rather than telling, the pattern and process of the creative act by which the imagination gains the power and accomplishes the act of creating this ceremony. The creative act is embodied in the movement of the poem; and this movement "towards its own end" is rendered not only in the triadic structure, but also by the texture and imagery of "Ceremony After A Fire Raid."

The action of "Ceremony After A Fire Raid" is rendered as the experience of three different functions of consciousness rendered as three distinct speakers; and the characteristics of these three speakers embody the qualities and values of the function of mind and the mode of encountering and creating which each experiences. The movement from "we" to "I" to obliteration of self also renders the poem's movement from multiplicity to duality to unity in the final act of complete

identification and unification. In part one, it is "Myselfes/The grievors" and "myselfes the believers" who mourn the death of the child. The "we" of these four stanzas represents diffuse multiple selves, a feeling organism without a sense of identity as a particular, single consciousness. This lack of individual identity embodies the grieving function of part one, for the multiplicity of "Myselfes/The grievors" images a congregation of mourners and renders the emotional perception of the unity of all mankind in the sharing of grief. The use of the plural "our" to modify and characterize the singular "heart" in the final line of stanza three--"As the grains blow, as your death grows, in our heart"--images this emotional unity; all hearts are one in the experience of grief and the action of mourning. This sense of identity is the initial step in the movement to unification with life's process.

In part two, the poem moves out of this emotional response to the experience of the fire raid and into the quest for understanding; and this is imaged in the movement from "myselfes" to "I," as the individual consciousness is differentiated out of the multiple selves. The act of this individual consciousness is rendered in terms of the dialectical method of the reasoning being; this duality is structurally embodied in the two stanzas of part two, and this division into two stanzas is a structural contrast to the multiple stanzas of part one and the single, unified

stanza of the ceremony in part three. In addition, the act of knowing, which is the function of the intellect, is rendered twice. For "I" is repeated twice in part two; both stanzas open with "I know": "I know not whether" and "I know the legend." The dialectic between "I know" and "I know not" thus links the "I," who is here established as the subject of part two, to the function of knowing, of seeking understanding, as the reflective consciousness tries to comprehend the significance of the child's death. Thus, from the partial submersion of self in the emotional response of part one, the poem particularizes its experience in terms of a clearly differentiated, distinct consciousness. And the focus of part two is on the consciousness which separates itself from the emotional response to the death of the child and seeks to understand death. The reflective consciousness, like the multiple emotional selves, also seeks to create a ceremony. As the "grievers" of part one "sing" so the "I" in part two speaks of "my service" and tries to analyze and comprehend its function in the context of death. In both stanzas, the speaker attempts to "know" the relationship between "Adam and Eve," the first death, and the recent death of "the one/Child"; he attempts to rationally unify the death of the child with the past losses of mankind. As "myselfes" feel and sing "Darkness kindled back into beginning," so the "I" "knows" but does not fully understand the significance of "Beginning crumbled back to darkness":

I know the legend  
 Of Adam and Eve is never for a second  
 Silent in my service  
 Over the dead infants  
 Over the one  
 Child who was priest and servants,  
 Word, singers, and tongue  
 In the cinder of the little skull,  
 Who was the serpent's  
 Night fall and the fruit like a sun,  
 Man and woman undone,  
 Beginning crumbled back to darkness  
 Bare as the nurseries  
 Of the garden of wilderness.

With the beginning of part three, the "I" disappears and the differentiated consciousness is obliterated.<sup>3</sup> The absence of a self or selves in the "music at the end" of the ceremony renders the lack of distinction between the self and the cosmos, the complete identification with the process of life. And the single stanza, which consists of a single poetic sentence, structurally embodies the unity achieved, as part three transcends both the multiplicity of part one's four end-stopped stanzas and the duality of part two's two stanzas. In both parts one and two, there is a consciousness which establishes itself as separated from the experience of death; the "we" and the "I" attempt to create "ceremony" but succeed only briefly and partially, for they cannot attain unity while their separateness is maintained. Even "myself," though diffuse, can not transcend their limitations as grieving observers rather than as active participants in the experience. It is only in part three that the ultimate submerging of self "into" union with all creation occurs; and the absence of a feeling

or thinking consciousness images this unitive condition of relationship, out of which the imagination creates; for there is no separation or differentiation--only "ceremony." The unitive condition necessary for creation is thus achieved in the process of movement out of the self--out of the "we" and "I"--and "into" unity with the cosmos.

The achievement of this unity in the movement of the poem is embodied in the central "host of images," which grows and moves in the poem's process. The movement of these central images renders the movement from the emotional "we" to the rational, reflective "I," to the imagination's act of unification and creation. And the structural movement of the poem, the pattern of the creative process, is embodied in the patterns of imagery. The three distinct modes of imaging embody the distinction among the three functions of mind and among the acts of the three parts; and the repetition and amplification of the same "host of images" throughout the poem unifies these three parts by revealing the images--and thus the poem's three sections--in a condition of vital relationship and interdependence.

The central "host of images" is revealed in the poem's title, for it entitles the two clusters of images which move throughout the poem to final unification in the images of part three. Images which render "fire" move part one, and images which embody and seek to achieve "ceremony" or ritual dominate part two; and the ultimate "ceremony after



a fire raid" is rendered in the union of these images in part three. The images of part one render the perception of the destruction and horror of the fire raid and the agony of the child's death; and it is this experience which evokes the grief and mourning which are the emotion and act of part one.

The first stanza of part one carries the host of fire images, rendering the perception of the newborn child's experience of fiery death:

Myselfes  
 The grieverson  
 Grieve  
 Among the street burned to tireless death  
 A child of a few hours  
 With its kneading mouth  
 Charred on the black breast of the grave  
 The mother dug, and its arms full of fires.

And the remaining three stanzas of part one incorporate this perceived horror into the mourning acts of singing, praying, and crying. In stanza two the ceremonious process of "singing" transforms the first stanza's image of the child's fiery agony--"its arms full of fires"--into an embodiment of the relationship of the child's death to the cosmic force of birth and death; the image of the star's bursting flame relates the child "Charred on the black breast" to the black "Darkness kindled back into beginning"--the mysterious process of destruction and creation felt in the kindling of the fire raid--as the singing "grieverson" seek to emotionally apprehend the eternal process of creation and destruction:

Begin  
 With singing  
 Sing  
 Darkness kindled back into beginning  
 When the caught tongue nodded blind,  
 A star was broken  
 Into the centuries of the child  
 Myselfs grieve now, and miracles cannot atone.

Stanza three moves the poem from the fire images into images of fertility, which render the desire for unity and creation out of the agonizing destruction of the fire raid. The grieving selves beg the child's forgiveness for her death; and they also plead for the creative power to make life out of it, to transform the "charred" reality of the "child of a few hours" into the life giving "great flood" and spurting "blood." The singing griever's seek to make it possible that the child's "dust shall sing like a bird":

Forgive  
 Us forgive  
 Us your death that myselfs the believers  
 May hold it in a great flood  
 Till the blood shall spurt,  
 And the dust shall sing like a bird  
 As the grains blow, as your death grows, through our heart

But stanza three marks the culmination of the creative possibility of the grieving selves; for they are incapable of creating a fully unified ceremony. Thus their grief cannot be emotionally transcended; and in stanza four it reaches its height in the "crying" which finally purges grief. The "host of images" which moves part one is also culminated, through repetition and amplification, in stanza four. The first stanza's image of "the street burned to tireless death" is repeated in the image of "the fire-

dwarfed/Street" of stanza four; and the image in stanza one of the dead child, "Charred on the black breast of the grave/The mother dug," is amplified in the image of the "Seed of sons in the loin of the black husk left." As the first image renders the destruction of the mother's life-sustaining breast, so the final image embodies the destruction of the child's creative possibilities--the "seed of sons." The image of "myself" who "chant the flying sea" in stanza four compresses both the ceremonious action of "singing" rendered in stanza two and the quest for creative power imaged in the "great flood" of stanza three. Thus, stanza four culminates the movement of the central "host of images" from the grieving of stanza one through the singing of stanza two and the praying of stanza three to the final crying of stanza four.

The images of creativity and fertility in stanza three of part one are expanded and amplified in the two stanzas of part two; for the differentiated, knowing consciousness seeks to understand the relationship of the child to the process of life and death, imaged in terms of the first death, "the legend/Of Adam and Eve." The earlier images of the creativity which was sought and lost become the "white" images of Eden's ritual in part two: the "singing" of part one becomes "my service" in part two, as images of ritual and ceremony seek to link "the legend/Of Adam and Eve" with "the chosen virgin/Laid in her snow/On the altar of London." Throughout part two, then, the "I" seeks to

"know" how death in the abstract is connected to the death of the child, how "Adam and Eve" exist in relationship to "the cinder of the little skull":

I know not whether  
 Adam or Eve, the adorned holy bullock  
 Or the white ewe lamb  
 Or the chosen virgin  
 Laid in her snow  
 On the altar of London,  
 Was the first to die  
 In the cinder of the little skull,  
 O bride and bride groom  
 O Adam and Eve together  
 Lying in the lull  
 Under the sad breast of the head stone  
 White as the skeleton  
 Of the garden of Eden.

The images of ritual which mark part two render the attempt of the cognitive consciousness to create ceremony, parallelling the similar attempt of the emotional selves in part one. But part two does not succeed in creating ceremony; stanza one moves through images of ritual and Edenic creativity into the analysis of "my service" in stanza two, but both stanzas end with parallel images of the desolation and barrenness of the dead Eden as it is rationally perceived:

White as the skeleton  
 Of the garden of Eden.

Bare as the nurseries  
 Of the garden of wilderness.

The movement from "Eden" at the end of stanza one to "wilderness" at the conclusion of stanza two embodies the ultimate failure of the reflecting consciousness to create, out of its dialectical method, a "service" which transcends

and celebrates both life and death; for the duality of the intellect is incapable of unifying "Eden" and "wilderness."

The image of the child is expanded in part two, thus moving the poem's vision of the death beyond the senses' perception and the emotions' response to its horror. For in stanza one of part two the child is imaged as a sacrifice, the meaning and significance of which the "I" seeks to understand; the child is "the chosen virgin/Laid in her snow/On the altar of London." And in stanza two, the child is identified with all of the ritual functions of "my service":

Over the dead infants  
Over the one  
Child who was priest and servants,  
Word, singers, and tongue  
In the cinder of the little skull,

The "chosen virgin" and the "Child who was priest and servants/Word, singers, and tongue" is thus understood as a partaker in the process of life and death, comprehended in the "legend/Of Adam and Eve" as well as in the fire raid. But this understanding is inadequate to deal with the mystery and despair felt by the emotional selves in part one, the mystery of "Darkness kindled back into beginning." Rather, the reflective consciousness can only understand that the opposite is real--"Beginning crumbled back to darkness"--it cannot unify the two; and this leads to the concluding image of barrenness, as part two ends without unification and without the complete creation of ceremony. Only in the ceremony of part three are the two opposites

unified through the movement "into" the process and the imaginative act which experiences the identity of "Darkness kindled back into beginning" and "Beginning crumbled back to darkness."

The two central image clusters--of fire and ritual--are united in the act of part three, which creates "glory" and culminates the ceremony. Part three begins with the movement of the imagination "into" the creative act of "the music at the end"--"Into the organpipes and steeples/Of the luminous cathedrals." And the imagination's act of unification with the cosmic process of life occurs in the context of its entrance "into" the ceremonious musical ritual of "the luminous cathedrals." The images which continue the ceremony embody this unitive act, for the images themselves unify the disparate, opposing images of fiery death and creative ritual which dominate the first two parts of the poem. The total image pattern of part three thus renders the act and process which moves the poem to "its own end" in "glory":

Into the organpipes and steeples  
 Of the luminous cathedrals,  
 Into the weathercocks' molten mouths  
 Rippling in twelve-winded circles,  
 Into the dead clock burning the hour  
 Over the urn of sabbaths  
 Over the whirling ditch of daybreak  
 Over the sun's hovel and the slum of fire  
 And the golden pavements laid in requiems,  
 Into the bread in a wheatfield of flames,  
 Into the wine burning like brandy,  
 The masses of the sea  
 The masses of the sea under  
 The masses of the infant-bearing sea  
 Erupt, fountain, and enter to utter for ever  
 Glory glory glory  
 The sundering ultimate kingdom of genesis' thunder.

The "fire-dwarfed street" and the "street burned to tireless death" of part one are imaginatively transformed into ceremonious objects as the creative spirit moves "Over the sun's hovel and the slum of fire"; for the street destroyed by fire becomes the newly-created "golden pavements laid in requiems." And the "charred" remains of the child, her "dust," are recalled in the ritual of burial imaged in the creative movement of the imagination "Over the urn of sabbaths."

The temporal element, which emphasizes both the brevity of the child's life, in part one--"A child of a few hours" burned to death on its mother's breast--and the significance of the first fall and death, in part two--"I know the legend/Of Adam and Eve is never for a second/Silent in my service"--is transmuted in part three into an image which embodies life and death and the movement of time's process in the midst of the fiery holocaust: "Into the dead clock burning the hour." And in part three the "dead clock" is "burning the hour" both of death and of the creation of ceremony, as the imagination enters "into" the process of time and into the act of unifying traditional religious ritual--"bread," "wind," and "masses"--both with the products of nature's creative process--the "wheatfield" and the "sea"-- and with the "burning" action of the fire raid's "flames":

Into the bread in a wheatfield of flames,  
 Into the wine burning like brandy,  
 The masses of the sea  
 The masses of the sea under  
 The masses of the infant-bearing sea

This unifying act of entering "into" life's process creates the ultimate ceremony, which includes and transcends the separate rituals of both nature and religion in the "glory" of unification and praise of creation, embodied in the awe-inspiring moment of the poem's final lines:

Erupt, fountain, and enter to utter for ever  
 Glory glory glory  
 The sundering ultimate kingdom of genesis' thunder.

Thus, "darkness" and "Beginning," "crumbled" and "kindled," "sundering" and "genesis"--destruction and creation--are ultimately united in praise and celebration of the creative-destructive power of "the sundering ultimate kingdom of genesis' thunder." And the poem itself is an image of "genesis' thunder"; it is the creative and creating "thunder" which results from the "fire" and transforms it into "ceremony." And as thunder is distinctive by virtue of its power and sound, so the ceremony is powerful "music." The creative act which makes this ceremony achieves what the poetic consciousness of "The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower" was "dumb to tell"; it perceives the unity in diversity, the destruction interent in creation, the death which is present in the moment of birth--the "sundering" which is an integral part of the creative power and "force" of "genesis' thunder."

The poem also celebrates the creative act of the poet's imagination, which achieves the creation of this magnificent



and glorious ceremony of "praise" out of the death and destruction of the fire raid. "Ceremony After A Fire Raid" is thus the ultimate celebration and fulfillment of the life of the poet's art, for its transcendent achievement triumphs over death--the existence of such a poem ensures that death shall have no dominion.

## CHAPTER VII

### CELEBRATION OF THE "BURNING AND CRESTED ACT" OF POETIC CREATION

It has been demonstrated that celebration of the poet's imaginative act of creation is present in the structure and image of several of the most successful and important of Thomas's poems. In several other poems, subject and theme unite with image and structure to create poetic renderings of the poet's act--poems which are "about" making and writing poetry. The earlier poems--those in 18 Poems, 25 Poems, and The Map Of Love--image the poet's act as identical to the creative process of God and nature; the poet is imaged as a godlike maker whose organic process of creating images and poems imitates nature's method of creating organic creatures. Thus, the poet's verbal structures--the created objects which are the products of this process--are imaged as organic, physical structures in poems such as "When Once The Twilight Locks No Longer" (4), from 18 Poems, "I, In My Intricate Image" (40), and "Then Was My Neophyte" (78), from 25 Poems, and "How Shall My Animal" (100), from The Map Of Love. As in Thomas's "centre of images" statement--in which he describes his method of creating and "breeding" images--these poems image the poet's relationship to his poems as an organic, vital, ongoing relationship between the creator and his living creature;

this pattern of imaging relationship is exemplified by "When Once The Twilight Locks No Longer":

When the galactic sea was sucked  
And all the dry seabed unlocked,  
I sent my creature scouting on the globe,  
That globe itself of hair and bone  
That, sewn to me by nerve and brain,  
Had stringed my flask of matter to his rib.

My fuses timed to charge his heart,  
He blew like powder to the light  
And held a little sabbath with the sun,  
But when the stars, assuming shape,  
Drew in his eyes the straws of sleep,  
He drowned his father's magics in a dream.

Of the poems in his first two volumes, Thomas believed that "Then Was My Neophyte" was "the best . . . . it is clearer and more definite, and . . . it holds more possibilities of progress, than anything else I've done."<sup>1</sup> The poem's "host of images" embodies both the organic relationship between the creator and his "newly planted"<sup>2</sup> living "child" as well as the artistic relationship between the poet and his artifact. As in stanza one of "How Shall My Animal,"<sup>3</sup> the opening two stanzas of "Then Was My Neophyte" image the physical, organic relationship between the creator and "my neophyte":

Then was my neophyte,  
Child in white blood bent on its knees  
Under the bell of rocks,  
Ducked in the twelve, disciple seas  
The winder of the water-clocks  
Calls a green day and night.  
My sea hermaphrodite,  
Snail of man in His ship of fires  
That burn the bitten decks,  
Knew all His horrible desires  
The climber of the water sex  
Calls the green rock of light.

Yet within this image cluster in stanzas one and two is the "seed" of the second and related "host of images" which dominates stanzas three and four; for the image of the creator as "the winder of the water-clocks" in stanza one is echoed in stanza three in the "winder of the clockwise scene." In stanza three, then, this winding action is amplified into an image of the creator as director of a film; and with the shift in imagistic emphasis there is a shift in perspective, a movement away from the focus on the creator's perception of "my neophyte" to the active response of the creature to the creator-director's formative act and control:

He films my vanity.  
 Shot in the wind, by tilted arcs,  
 Over the water come  
 Children from homes and children's parks  
 Who speak on a finger and thumb,  
 And the masked, headless boy.  
 His reels and mystery  
 The winder of the clockwise scene  
 Wound like a ball of lakes  
 Then threw on that tide-hoisted screen  
 Love's image till my beartbone breaks  
 By a dramatic sea.

Other images of the visual arts of painting and photography, in stanza two, serve to further the poem's movement from the organic to the artistic relationship between poet and poem.<sup>4</sup> These images function transitionally to move the poem from the active organic relationship of stanza one through the comparatively still, static forms of the photograph and the painting in stanza two, to the active artistic relationship of stanzas three and four, in which the organic relationship is expanded and augmented:

Stretch the salt photographs,  
 The landscape grief, love in His oils  
 Mirror from man to whale  
 That the green child see like a grail  
 Through veil and fin and fire and coil  
 Time on the canvas paths.

Thus, the creator is perceived both as a godlike maker of organic creatures and also as a director of the "neophyte"-- as an artist whose act is to create new living images out of life's natural materials, out of the process of the "neophyte's" existence. And this creating director not only "films my vanity" but also creates "Love's image" on the "tide-hoisted screen"; the creative act, then, is an act of love which creates an image of love.

Thomas's later poems "about" his craft and art celebrate the motivating force of love; for the love of creating and of the created object inspire the imaginative process. As Thomas asserted in his "Poetic Manifesto," he early "fell in love" with words and with the creative possibilities available to a "writer of words."<sup>5</sup> This love of words and of creating new, living structures out of them, is related to the poet's "love of Man," for which, he wrote in the last year of his life, "these poems, with all their crudities, doubts, and confusions, are written."<sup>6</sup>

The creative power of love is imaged throughout the last half of the Collected Poems, most successfully in "After The Funeral" and "In The White Giant's Thigh" (197); in "After The Funeral," the poet's love motivates him to

create the living form of his "memorial" as a permanent "service" in honor of Ann Jones' life and death. And in "In The White Giant's Thigh," the poet's imagination redeems the sterility of the long-dead women--"barren as boulders"--who "lie longing still" and "yearn with tongues of curlews for the unconceived/And immemorial sons." The poet imaginatively seeks union with the women--"Now curlew cry me down to kiss the mouths of their dust"--and "they" "teach" him "the love that is evergreen," that is eternal; for, as in "And Death Shall Have No Dominion," "Though lovers be lost love shall not." The poet's love creates the life--in the form of a poem--which the women and their "simple Jacks" could not create out of their sexual union; and the women are thus given new fertility and vitality by the poetic act of love--"And the daughters of darkness flame like Fawkes fires still." The later poems which explicitly render the experience of the poetic imagination--"The Hunchback In The Park" (123), "In My Craft Or Sullen Art" (142), and the "Author's Prologue" (xv), the last poem Thomas completed--image the essentially loving quality of the poetic act of creation.

"The Hunchback In The Park" images the poet's creative act of love in the hunchback's imaginative creation of a woman companion to "stand in the night//. . . . All night in the unmade park" as the hunchback sleeps in his "kennel in the dark." The movement of "In My Craft Or Sullen Art" reveals the affirmation of the poet's relationship to the

lovers; and this affirmation purges the sullenness of art. And in "Author's Prologue," addressed "to my readers, the strangers,"<sup>7</sup> the poetic process is imaged as a "burning and crested act" and poetry is "my bellowing ark" which is made "to the best of my love," and sent sailing "to you strangers."

The apparent simplicity of "The Hunchback In The Park" tends to overshadow the poem's structural and imagistic complexity; it is, as Aneirin Talfan Davies asserts, a poem "of the poet's vocation."<sup>8</sup> The poet's creative power, his loving relationship to the creatures of his imagination, and his close ties to the natural world are imaged both in the figure of the hunchback and in the image of "the wild boys" who torment him. For both the hunchback and the boys in the park are imaginers, creators of living forms--the "woman figure without fault" and the "tigers" and "sailors"; and they are both contrasted to the unimaginative mode of "the park keeper/With his stick that picked up leaves." The identity between the hunchback and the boys is clearly rendered through the poem's imagery; and the poem's structure also embodies movement towards identification.

The three end stops--concluding the second, fourth, and seventh stanzas of "The Hunchback In The Park"--serve to separate the poem into three parts, which are linked and unified by the central "host of images" as the poem moves towards imagistic identification of boys and hunchback,

through their relationship to the natural elements of the park as well as through their similarity as imaginers. The poem's first two parts both consist of two stanzas--each a single poetic sentence--which image the hunchback's life in the park and his persecution by the boys. The third part, in contrast, consists of the final three stanzas and renders the poet's imaginative vision of the imagining and creating act of both the boys and the hunchback, concluding with the unifying image of stanza seven, which links hunchback, boys, and park.

The movement of "The Hunchback In The Park" is essentially imagistic; rhythm and structure are "bare" and simple, reminiscent of the ballad form, and the poem's progression is the result of the amplification and expansion of the images, which move towards unification. In stanza one, the hunchback is perceived in the context of nature's elements in the park; he is "Propped between trees and water," a "solitary mister" in the "garden" of the "park." In stanza two, "trees and water"--the hunchback's setting--are replaced by the "bread from a newspaper" and "water from the chained cup" which provide his sustenance. And this amplification of the image--in which "water" is constant--renders an expansion in the vision of the hunchback's relationship to the "park." This expanded vision is culminated in stanza three, the first stanza of the poem's second part. In stanza three the hunchback is imaged in terms of the birds and water of the park; he is identified



with these natural elements by means of a simile:

Like the park birds he came early  
Like the water he sat down

The images which describe the "garden"-park are further expanded in stanza four as water becomes "lake" and the earlier images of "trees," "bread," and "birds," which join with the "water," are expanded to include the "rockery" through which the boys run. And in stanza five, the boys' imagined tigers "roar on the rockery stones." The hunchback's imaginative creation is also identified imaginistically with the park environment; she is linked to the trees of stanza one, again by means of a simile--she is "straight as a young elm." And finally, these images of the natural elements of the park are unified in the final stanza, as the hunchback is seen in the context of the natural inhabitants of the "unmade park"--"The birds the grass the trees the lake."

The final unifying stanza also brings together the images which gradually--from stanza three to stanza five--incorporate the boys into the natural life of the park. In stanza three, they are "the truant boys from the town," visitors to the park from the outside world. Yet in stanza four, they run "through the loud zoo of the willow groves" and in stanza five, when they create their "tigers" and "sailors," they are described as "the boys among willows"--integral natural elements of the park. Finally, stanza seven unifies the boys with the park's natural creatures, revealing them--along with the birds, grass, trees, and

water--as among the elemental creatures of the "garden,"  
 who join to follow the hunchback to his "kennel in the dark":

All night in the unmade park  
 After the railings and shrubberies  
 The birds the grass the trees the lake  
 And the wild boys innocent as strawberries  
 Had followed the hunchback  
 To his kennel in the dark.

The relationship between the hunchback and the boys is also rendered as a movement towards identification. In stanza two the boys are "children" who fill the hunchback's cup "with gravel," an image which prepares for the "truant boys" of stanzas three and four who are imaged as tormentors of the hunchback in the park:

Like the park birds he came early  
 Like the water he sat down  
 And Mister they called Hey mister  
 The truant boys from the town  
 Running when he had heard them clearly  
 On out of sound

Past lake and rockery  
 Laughing when he shook his paper  
 Hunchbacked in mockery  
 Through the loud zoo of the willow groves  
 Dodging the park keeper  
 With his stick that picked up leaves.

The boys' imitation of the hunchback "in mockery" leads to the image of their unwitting imitation of his imaginative process; and the poet perceives this identification of boys and hunchback as imaginers and creators in stanzas five and six:

And the old dog sleeper  
 Alone between nurses and swans  
 While the boys among willows  
 Made the tigers jump out of their eyes  
 To roar on the rockery stones  
 And the groves were blue with sailors

Made all day until bell time  
 A woman figure without fault  
 Straight as a young elm  
 Straight and tall from his crooked bones  
 That she might stand in the night  
 After the locks and chains.

The key word in these two stanzas is "made"; as the boys create tigers and sailors out of their imaginative desires, so does the hunchback make his "woman figure without fault" out of his imaginative vision of perfection. Thus, the image of the park as "unmade" implicitly contrasts it and its creatures, as well as the boys and the hunchback--the creators--to the "made" objects of the imagination which brighten the park lives of both the boys and the hunchback.

The image of the boys as "wild" inhabitants of the "loud zoo of the willow groves," and finally as creatures "innocent as strawberries" further identifies them with the hunchback, who is also imaged in terms of nature's organic creatures. As the boys are "wild" little beasts of the "loud zoo" so the hunchback is portrayed as "the old dog sleeper" in stanza five, who "Slept at night in a dog kennel" in stanzas two and seven; he is also "like the park birds." And as the boys are "innocent as strawberries" so the hunchback is "Like the water."

The image of the boys and the hunchback as natural creative elements in the park not only unifies them but also contrasts them to the park keeper, whose detachment from the natural world of the park is imaged in his function as an official guard and tidier of the "loud zoo of the willow groves"; he is separated from "the birds the grass the trees the lake" by his stick, and from the hunchback and the "wild" boys by his function as guard, or "keeper," of the park: "the park keeper/With his stick that picked up leaves." This third world of the unimaginative, detached adult is also suggested in the poem in the image of the "chained cup" in stanza two and the "locks and chains" which close the park after the "Sunday sombre bell at dark." These "locks and chains" of the park keeper's world are avoided by the hunchback--"But nobody chained him up." And so, detached from the "park keeper" and the outside world, the hunchback and the boys take part in the natural creative process of the park and "make" their imaginative worlds within it from morning to night--"From the opening of the garden lock" to "the Sunday sombre bell at dark."

Yet in spite of the identity of the hunchback and the boys as imaginers and creators, the hunchback is "a solitary mister," "Alone between nurses and swans"; and even the boys who share his imaginative mode of living are detached from him, establishing themselves as his tormentors. The hunchback is a freak and misfit, a grotesque outsider in the eyes of

both the society outside the park and the society of the "wild boys." Yet the hunchback is the one who images perfection; "from his crooked bones" he lovingly creates a perfect, living form:

Made all day until bell time  
A woman figure without fault

In addition to the natural, "unmade" world of the park and the artistic "made" world which the hunchback's imagination creates, is the world and time of the poetic consciousness which makes the poem; for his imaginative vision creates the image of the hunchback's creative act and the loved object, the "woman figure," which is the product of this act. The creator of "The Hunchback In The Park" identifies, in the process of the poem, with the creative act of both the hunchback and the boys; he explicitly reveals his relationship to both only briefly, in stanza two, by placing himself--the "I"--in the context of the park:

Drinking water from the chained cup  
That the children filled with gravel  
In the fountain basin where I sailed my ship }

As in "Fern Hill" and "Poem In October" the poet's imaginative use of memory enables him to recreate a moment of childhood; but unlike "Fern Hill" and "Poem In October" the emphasis in "The Hunchback In The Park" is on the active, creative acts of the hunchback and the boys, not on the creative moments of the individual childhood. For although the child-poet is

implicitly identified with the imagining boys, he does not reappear as an active participant in their behavior, either as creators of the tigers and sailors or as tormentors of the hunchback.

Implicit in the third part of the poem is the creative act which makes the poem; and the image of the hunchback's creative act renders the similar creative process of the poetic consciousness. As the hunchback makes the "woman figure without fault," so the poet seeks to make the poem, "The Hunchback In The Park"; he seeks to make poems which exist as living forms "without fault." And the image of the created object as an organic creature--a woman--parallels and culminates images, from the earlier poems, of the poetic product as "my creature," "my neophyte," and "my animal," embodying the poet's organic relationship to his poem.

In contrast to "The Hunchback In The Park" and the earlier poems "about" the process of writing poetry--which focus on the creative process and on the organic, loving relationship between the creator and his created object--"In My Craft Or Sullen Art" images the loving nature of the poet's act in terms of its analogy and relationship to the desired audience--the "lovers." Like the hunchback, the poet of "In My Craft Or Sullen Art" is a "solitary mister"; but unlike the hunchback, he is conscious of his need and desire for relationship between his poems and an active, living audience--for only in a condition of relationship can

the poet create art which is not "sullen." Through the process of the poem, in its movement from the first to the last line, which is a progression from detachment to relationship, this sullenness of the poetic art is purged; and it is eliminated by the imaginative apprehension and affirmation of his creative function and loving relationship to the audience, through the imagistic identification of the poet's act with the lovers' act.

"In My Craft Or Sullen Art" is a brief, two stanza poem in which, as in "The Hunchback In The Park," the repetition and amplification of its few central images creates the movement; and the movement of "In My Craft Or Sullen Art" is towards relationship and the purging of sullenness, through the act of creation which makes the poem and which the poem embodies. The first stanza images the poet's solitary nocturnal "exercise" of his "craft or sullen art," and seeks to establish relationship between the poet and the "lovers":

In my craft or sullen art  
 Exercised in the still night  
 When only the moon rages  
 And the lovers lie abed  
 With all their griefs in their arms,  
 I labour by singing light

The poem opens, then, with the predicament of the "I," the differentiated, individuated consciousness which perceives its existence and function in terms of its condition of separation and isolation; "my craft or sullen art" is "exercised" in the stillness and solitude of the night--with

only the raging moon for company. But the "I" of the poem is also the individuated poetic consciousness, the imagination, whose need is to create living poetic structures, and which therefore needs an audience. Thus the "I" seeks to make poems which exist in a condition of relationship to an audience, and the opening stanza of this poem establishes the analogy between poet and lovers which leads to the creation of relationship between the two.

Both poet and lovers perform their creative act "in the still night"; and the poet's act thus parallels the lovers' act of love which, like the poet's, is also an act of creation. The first stanza concludes with the poet's movement to a consideration of his function and of the goal for which he creates poems:

I labour by singing light  
 Not for ambition or bread  
 Or the strut and trade of charms  
 On the ivory stages  
 But for the common wages  
 Of their most secret heart.

The structure of these lines is an oscillation between negative--"Not for . . ."--and positive--"But for . . ."--assertions of the poetic goal of relationship. The poem's second, shorter stanza continues this tension; but the focus is altered as the poet turns his attention more directly to his audience. Instead of rejecting generalized fame and fortune--"ambition or bread"--as a goal, he asserts his rejection of two possible audiences:



Not for the proud man apart  
 From the raging moon I write  
 On these spindrift pages  
 Nor for the towering dead  
 With their nightingales and psalms

Unlike the lovers, who "lie abed" while the poet writes and "only the moon rages," the "proud man" is "apart," detached from this life under the "raging moon"; and the poet rejects him. Also in contrast to the lovers, whose sole occupation is love and whose lives are therefore vital and creative, the "towering dead," the glorious past, can give the poet nothing of life or inspiration from their "nightingales and psalms." Thus, the final affirmative movement of the poem asserts the relationship between the poet and the lovers which is established implicitly in stanza one. The poem concludes with this affirmation of the lovers' act and of the poet's own creation of life through his "craft or art":

But for the lovers, their arms  
 Round the griefs of the ages,  
 Who pay no praise or wages  
 Nor heed my craft or art.

The poem's implicit realization, in stanza one, of the relationship between the poet and the lovers culminates in these final lines as his vision of their life "in the still night" is expanded; this expansion of vision is rendered in the amplification of the image which portrays the lovers. In stanza one, they "lie abed/With all their griefs in their arms." But in stanza two the lovers' personal "griefs" have become "the griefs of the ages,"

held in their arms as they engage in the eternal, ongoing process of life. For "the griefs of the ages" are the living truths of existence which the poet seeks to embody in his art. The realization and affirmation of this relationship and of his identity with the lovers enables the poet to purge the sullenness from the "exercise" of his art and craft, for he has found an appropriate audience for the poems which celebrate life, and the poem's process has established relationship with the "lovers." And the poet can celebrate this relationship in spite of the fact that the lovers--involved in living and loving--"pay no praise or wages/Nor heed my craft or art." The movement of the poem is thus from detachment to imaginative relationship, from "craft or sullen art" to "craft or art." The predicament of isolation, then, is conquered by the poetic process of creation and is achieved and rendered in this movement of the poem, which eliminates sullenness. The "I" has involved itself in life, then, by identification with the lovers; and it has thus imaginatively moved out of solitude and into attachment as it poetically transcends its initial condition as a "solitary mister."

The poem without audience is "sullen" and detached; but the creative relationship--imaginatively perceived--between the poetic consciousness and the lovers, provides inspiration in the struggle to embody "the griefs of the ages" in newly made forms--forms which do not rely on the traditional "nightingales and psalms" of the "towering dead." And the poem's sullenness can thus be eliminated as

the poet writes for the lovers, not for "praise or wages" but "for the common wages/Of their most secret heart"; the poetic act of love is embodied in the poems which it creates, poems made "for the love of Man" and "in praise" and celebration of life.

"Author's Prologue" is the creating imagination's final "poetical argument," as the poem "addresses the readers, the 'strangers,' with a flourish, and fanfare, and makes clear, or tries to make clear, the position of one writer in a world 'at poor peace.'"<sup>9</sup> Although written to introduce Collected Poems to "the strangers," "Author's Prologue" is, as Thomas wrote to Oscar Williams, "a complete poem by itself, not just something written especially for a collected volume."<sup>10</sup> And the poet's intentions for his "Prologue in verse"--which he believed the poem successfully accomplished ("it does do what it sets out to do")<sup>11</sup>--were set forth in a letter to his agent. This statement makes clear the deliberateness of Thomas's attempt to embody, in "Author's Prologue," the values of the Collected Poems:

. . . a Prologue in verse, but (fairly) straightforward and colloquial, addressed to the (may be) readers of the Collected Poems, and full (I hope) of references to my methods of work, my aims, and the kind of poetry I want to write.<sup>12</sup>

The "Author's Prologue," in a "straightforward and colloquial" manner, images the poet's process as:

a burning and crested act  
The fire of birds in  
The world's turning wood,

And the poem, a "rumpus of shapes," or forms, seeks to embody the poet's vision, to "make clear . . . the position of one writer in a world 'at poor peace'":

as I hack

This rumpus of shapes  
For you to know  
How I, a spinning man,  
Glory also this star, bird  
Roared, sea born, man torn, blood blest.

The unitive vision of all creation--of the creative process of poet, nature, and God, and of its resultant creatures, animal and poem--is embodied in the poet's image of his function as "the moonshine/Drinking Noah of the bay." For the ark of poetry--the "Multitudes of arks!" which are the poems---hold and embody the imagination's loving encounter with the world:

O kingdom of neighbours, finned  
Felled and quilled, flash to my patch  
Work ark and the moonshine  
Drinking Noah of the bay.

The ark of poetry is built out of love and as a "watertight compartment" of life against the flood of time and death. And the poet is a "spinning man," a creator whose "burning and crested act" of creation is an act of love:

Look:

I build my bellowing ark  
To the best of my love  
As the flood begins,

The "multitudes of arks," creating new life in their embodiment of the poet's loving vision, are "manned with their loves" as they "move":

Cry, multitudes of arks! Across  
The water lidded lands,  
Manned with their loves they'll move,

"Author's Prologue" concludes with the poet's affirmation of the saving power of his poems; as the ark of Noah preserves its inhabitants from the destroying flood, so the lovingly built ark of poetry renders timeless and permanent the imaginative vision of the "star, bird/Roared, sea born, man torn, blood blest" in the ongoing process of life and time, the eternally flowering flood. The imagination's final "poetical" statement is of the joy and value of his art, the creative and redeeming "glory" of his poems:

My ark sings in the sun  
At God speeded summer's end  
And the flood flowers now.

## NOTES

### CHAPTER I: THE POETICS OF DYLAN THOMAS

<sup>1</sup>Dylan Thomas, "Sir Philip Sidney," in Quite Early One Morning (New York: New Directions, 1954), p. 86.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas, "On Poetry," in Quite Early One Morning, p. 121.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas, The Selected Letters of Dylan Thomas, ed. Constantine Fitzgibbon (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 196.

<sup>4</sup>These letters are included in Thomas, Selected Letters, and Thomas, Dylan Thomas: Letters to Vernon Watkins, ed. Vernon Watkins (New York: New Directions, 1957).

<sup>5</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 196.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 346.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 24.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 345.

<sup>9</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 219, "Organic reality is all my cock."

<sup>10</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 91.

<sup>13</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 219.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, pp. 28-29.

<sup>15</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, pp. 83-84.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 83.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 91.

<sup>18</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 83.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 88.

<sup>20</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 83.

- <sup>21</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 84.  
<sup>22</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 83.  
<sup>23</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 84.  
<sup>24</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 85.  
<sup>25</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 85.  
<sup>26</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 83.  
<sup>27</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 91.  
<sup>28</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 91.  
<sup>29</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 15.  
<sup>30</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 83.  
<sup>31</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 15.

These assertions also cast light on Thomas's statements about the influence of Freud; for Thomas does not declare that he is influenced by Freud's work, but only that both poet and analyst are concerned with the same self-creating process and that part of the poet's function is the imaginative amplification of the rendering of that process--in which Freud was an exciting pioneer:

Whatever is hidden should be made naked. To be stripped of darkness is to be clean, to strip of darkness is to make clean. Poetry, recording the stripping of the individual darkness, must, inevitably, cast light upon what has been hidden for too long, and, by so doing, make clean the naked exposure. Freud cast light on a little of the darkness he had exposed. Benefiting by the sight of the light and the knowledge of the hidden nakedness, poetry must drag further into the clean nakedness of light more even of the hidden causes than Freud could realize. "Replies to an Enquiry," Quite Early One Morning, p. 120.

My only acquaintance with the theories and discoveries of Dr. Freud has been through the work of novelists who have been excited by his case-book histories, of popular newspaper scientific-potboilers who have, I imagine, vulgarised his work beyond recognition, and of a few modern poets, including Auden, who have attempted to use psychoanalytical [sic] phraseology and theory in

some of their poems . . . . Again, no honest writer today can possibly avoid being influenced by Freud through his pioneering work into the Unconscious & by the influence of those discoveries on the scientific, philosophic, & artistic work of his contemporaries: but not, by any means, necessarily through Freud's own writing. "Poetic Manifesto: A Manuscript," Texas Quarterly, IV (1961), 49-50.

- <sup>32</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 16.
- <sup>33</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 14.
- <sup>34</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 15.
- <sup>35</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 16.
- <sup>36</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 10
- <sup>37</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 12.
- <sup>38</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 15.
- <sup>39</sup>Thomas, The Collected Poems (New York: New Directions, 1953), p. 33.
- <sup>40</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 87.
- <sup>41</sup>Thomas, Collected Poems, p. 10.
- <sup>42</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 10.
- <sup>43</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 10.
- <sup>44</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 205.
- <sup>45</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 87.
- <sup>46</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 16.
- <sup>47</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 14.
- <sup>48</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 115.
- <sup>49</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 141.
- <sup>50</sup>Thomas, "Wilfred Owen," in Quite Early One Morning, p. 80.
- <sup>51</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 91.
- <sup>52</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 24.
- <sup>53</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 45.



- <sup>54</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 91.
- <sup>55</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 46.
- <sup>56</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 115.
- <sup>57</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 151.
- <sup>58</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 39.
- <sup>59</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 235.
- <sup>60</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 36.
- <sup>61</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 80.
- <sup>62</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 24.
- <sup>63</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 243.
- <sup>64</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 282.
- <sup>65</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 282.
- <sup>66</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 282.
- <sup>67</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 46.
- <sup>68</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 46.
- <sup>69</sup>Thomas, "Wilfred Owen," in Quite Early One Morning, p. 80.
- <sup>70</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 196. Also note Selected Letters, p. 231, for Thomas's request (one year later) that Treece rescind part of this passage: "Only one thing: do, for friendship's sake, cut out that remark of mine about 'I have a beast and an angel in me' or whatever it was; it makes me sick, drives me away from drink, recalls too much the worst of the fat and curly boy I know too well, he whose promises are water and whose water's Felinfoel, that nut-brown prince."
- <sup>71</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, pp. 38-39.
- <sup>72</sup>Thomas, "Replies to an Enquiry," in Quite Early One Morning, p. 119. Thomas defines "narrative movement" as "a progressive line, or theme, of movement in every poem."
- <sup>73</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, pp. 190-191. This passage will often be referred to in the succeeding pages. For convenience it will be referred to as the "centre of images" passage.
- <sup>74</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 30.

- <sup>75</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 190.
- <sup>76</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 52.
- <sup>77</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 52.
- <sup>78</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 184.
- <sup>79</sup>Thomas, "Replies to an Enquiry," in Quite Early One Morning, pp. 119-120.
- <sup>80</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, pp. 106-107.
- <sup>81</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 67.
- <sup>82</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 67.
- <sup>83</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 67.
- <sup>84</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 50.
- <sup>85</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 46.
- <sup>86</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 52.
- <sup>87</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 66.
- <sup>88</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 66.
- <sup>89</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 66.
- <sup>90</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 13.
- <sup>91</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 17.
- <sup>92</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 62.
- <sup>93</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 196.
- <sup>94</sup>See Geoffrey Moore, "Dylan Thomas," in Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet, A Collection of Biographical and Critical Essays, ed. E.W. Tedlock (London: William Heinemann, 1960), p. 266. Moore states that "one can be 'organic' and still agree to submit oneself to a control, either of a standard form like the villanelle or of a form of one's own making." Thomas, however, values intellectual and critical control of expression only as it serves the "imaginative purpose," not as an act of willing submission to intellect and reason. Rather, the "control" of "form" grows out of the needs and demands of the poet's "imaginative purpose."

- <sup>95</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 196.  
<sup>96</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 46.  
<sup>97</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, pp. 106-107.  
<sup>98</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 190.  
<sup>99</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 24.  
<sup>100</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 24.  
<sup>101</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 227.  
<sup>102</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 24.  
<sup>103</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 97.  
<sup>104</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 24.  
<sup>105</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 50.  
<sup>106</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 20.  
<sup>107</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 21.  
<sup>108</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 83.  
<sup>109</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 190.  
<sup>110</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 67.  
<sup>111</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 196.  
<sup>112</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 196.  
<sup>113</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 191.  
<sup>114</sup>Thomas, Collected Poems, p. xv.  
<sup>115</sup>Thomas, Collected Poems, p. 104.  
<sup>116</sup>Thomas, Collected Poems, p. 104.  
<sup>117</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 151.  
<sup>118</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 127.  
<sup>119</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 46.  
<sup>120</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 290.

- <sup>121</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 151.
- <sup>122</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 46.
- <sup>123</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 289.
- <sup>124</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 211.
- <sup>125</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 290.
- <sup>126</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 91.
- <sup>127</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 31.
- <sup>128</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 196.
- <sup>129</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 199.
- <sup>130</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 156.
- <sup>131</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 96.
- <sup>132</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 151.
- <sup>133</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 285. Also see note #165 for a definition of "texture."
- <sup>134</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 46.
- <sup>135</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 288.
- <sup>136</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, pp. 23-24.
- <sup>137</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 110.
- <sup>138</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 196.
- <sup>139</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 285.
- <sup>140</sup>Thomas, "Welsh Poets," in Quite Early One Morning, p. 63.
- <sup>141</sup>Thomas, "Welsh Poets," in Quite Early One Morning, p. 67.
- <sup>142</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 38.
- <sup>143</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 53.
- <sup>144</sup>Thomas, Collected Poems, Note.
- <sup>145</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 53.
- <sup>146</sup>Thomas, "On Poetry," in Quite Early One Morning, p. 121.
- <sup>147</sup>Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation and Other Essays (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1961), p. 14.

- 148Thomas, Selected Letters, pp. 80-81.
- 149Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 205.
- 150Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 270.
- 151Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 204.
- 152Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 151.
- 153Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 190.
- 154Thomas, "On Poetry," in Quite Early One Morning, p. 122.
- 155Thomas, "Sir Philip Sidney," in Quite Early One Morning, pp. 91-92.
- 156Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, pp. 38-39.
- 157Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 236.
- 158Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 336
- 159Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 338.
- 160Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 83.
- 161Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 53.
- 162Thomas, Collected Poems, Note.
- 163Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 67.
- 164Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 285.
- 165"Texture. Fine Arts. The representation of the structure of a surface as distinct from color or form . . . . The composition or structure of a substance." William Morris, ed. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1969), p. 1332.

This is certainly not the only case in which Thomas has chosen to use a word as it is usually associated with the visual arts to characterize literary art. For example, note his statement about the title of his Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog: "As you know, the name given to innumerable portrait paintings by their artists is, 'Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'--a perfectly straightforward title. Joyce used the painting-title for the first time as the title of a literary work. I myself made a bit of doggish fun of the painting-title." "Poetic Manifesto," 48-49.

<sup>166</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 290.

<sup>167</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, pp. 198-199

<sup>168</sup>Thomas, "Replies to an Enquiry," in Quite Early One Morning, p. 119.

CHAPTER II: CELEBRATION OF UNITY IN NATURE'S CREATIVE-  
DESTRUCTIVE PROCESS: "THE FORCE THAT THROUGH  
THE GREEN FUSE DRIVES THE FLOWER"

<sup>1</sup>Thomas, "On Poetry," in Quite Early One Morning, p. 122.  
See also "Replies to an Enquiry," in Quite Early One Morning, p. 120: Question: "As a poet, what distinguishes you, do you think, from an ordinary man?" Thomas: "Only the use of the medium of poetry to express the causes and forces which are the same in all men."

<sup>2</sup>Thomas, Collected Poems, p. 6. All future page citations to poems from Collected Poems will be included in the text, immediately following the first reference to the poem.

<sup>3</sup>See Thomas, Selected Letters, pp. 106-107.

<sup>4</sup>See Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 50.

CHAPTER III: CELEBRATION OF THE IMAGINATION'S CREATIVE POWER  
WITHIN LIFE'S TEMPORAL MOVEMENT: THE GROWTH  
OF VISION---"I SEE THE BOYS OF SUMMER"  
AND "FERN HILL"

<sup>1</sup>Thomas, "On Reading One's Own Poems," in Quite Early One Morning, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, pp. 190-191.

<sup>3</sup>See Thomas, "Three Poems," in Quite Early One Morning, p. 115. Also cited and discussed in relation to "Poem in October"; See Note #6, Chapter 4.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 50.

CHAPTER IV: CELEBRATION OF NATURAL AND POETIC  
CREATION OF LIFE: THE BIRTHDAY POEMS

<sup>1</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 48.

<sup>3</sup>In terms of tone and image, as well as structure, "Twenty-four Years" stands in a relationship to "Poem In October" which is parallel to the relationship between "I See The Boys Of Summer" and "Fern Hill."

<sup>4</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, pp. 20-21.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas, "Three Poems," in Quite Early One Morning, p. 115.  
See Note #3, Chapter 3.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 116.

CHAPTER V: CELEBRATION OF POETIC CREATION OF LIFE  
OUT OF THE ENCOUNTER WITH DEATH: THE  
IMAGINATION'S "REFUSAL TO MOURN"

<sup>1</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 44. The "sic" following "orgastic" is Watkins's. It should be noted, however, that Thomas is almost certainly using the adjectival form of "orgasm"--and is, therefore, correct in writing "orgastic" rather than, as Watkins implies with his "sic," misspelling "orgastic," the adjective "of, pertaining to, or characteristic of an orgy." The American Heritage Dictionary, p. 926.

<sup>2</sup>William F. Thrall, Addison Hibbard, and C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960), p. 505.

<sup>3</sup>Thrall, Hibbard and Holman, p. 505.

<sup>4</sup>Perhaps the best example of this revitalization of traditional poetic forms is the sonnet sequence, "Altarwise By Owl-light" (80).

<sup>5</sup>Thrall, Hibbard, and Holman, p. 505.

<sup>6</sup>"I, In My Intricate Image," Collected Poems, p. 40.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas said of "After the Funeral" that it "is the only [poem] I have written that is, directly, about the life

and death of one particular human being I knew--and not about the very many lives and deaths whether seen, as in my first poems, in the tumultuous world of my own being or, as in the later poems, in war, grief, and the great holes and corners of universal love." "On Reading One's Own Poems," in Quite Early One Morning, p. 111.

#### CHAPTER VI: UNITIVE VISION--THE ULTIMATE CELEBRATION: "CEREMONY AFTER A FIRE RAID"

<sup>1</sup>William York Tindall, A Reader's Guide to Dylan Thomas (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1962), p. 181.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas, Letters to Vernon Watkins, p. 115.

<sup>3</sup>Note the identical movement in "A Refusal To Mourn The Death, By Fire, Of A Child In London." Also note the absence of any consciousness in "And Death Shall Have No Dominion"--one of the earliest celebrations of the victory of the life of art over death.

#### CHAPTER VII: CELEBRATION OF THE "BURNING AND CRESTED ACT" OF POETIC CREATION

<sup>1</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup>"Late Latin neophytus, from New Testament Greek neophytos, 'newly planted.'" The American Heritage Dictionary, p. 881.

<sup>3</sup>How shall my animal  
Whose wizard shape I trace in the cavernous skull,  
Vessel of abscesses and exultation's shell,  
Endure burial under the spelling wall,  
The invoked, shrouding veil at the cap of the face,  
Who should be furious,  
Drunk as a vineyard snail, flailed like an octopus,  
Roaring, crawling, quarrel  
With the outside weathers,  
The natural circle of the discovered skies  
Draw down to its weird eyes? (100)

<sup>4</sup>"I, In My Intricate Image" (40) embodies the poet's relationship to his artifact in verbal and language, as well as physical/mental, images; these language images may be seen as parallel or analogous to the painting and film images of "There Was My Neophyte":



I, in my intricate image, stride on two levels,  
 Forged in man's minerals, the brassy orator  
 Laying my ghost in metal,  
 The scales of this twin world tread on the double,  
 My half ghost in armour hold hard in death's corridor,  
 To my man-iron sidle . . . .

Man was Cadaver's masker, the harnessing mantle,  
 Windily master of man was the rotten fathom,  
 My ghost in his metal neptune  
 Forged in man's mineral.  
 This was the god of beginning in the intricate seawhirl,  
 And my images roared and rose on heaven's hill.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas, "Poetic Manifesto," 45-46.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas, Collected Poems, Note.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas, Collected Poems, Note.

<sup>8</sup>Aneirin Talfan Davies, Dylan: Druid of the Broken Body  
 (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1964), p. 4.

<sup>9</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 377.

<sup>10</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 379.

<sup>11</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 377.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas, Selected Letters, p. 373. Also see pp. 377 and 379:

In two of the three letters in which Thomas mentions the "Author's Prologue" after its completion, he comments on the elaborate rhyme scheme of the poem--pointing it out to his correspondents while denying the value of this incredible example of craftsmanship:

To begin with, I set myself, foolishly perhaps, a most difficult technical task: The Prologue is in two verses--in my manuscript, a verse to a page--of 51 lines each. And the second verse rhymes backward with the first. The first & last lines of the poem rhyme: the second and the last but one; & so on & so on. Why I acrosticked myself like this, don't ask me.

Unnecessarily, & with great trouble, I have, as you might notice, rhymed all the way back from line 51 to line 1.

Thomas's disclaimers to the contrary, perhaps his emphasis on this "most difficult technical task" is itself one of the "references to my methods of work." The very act of creating this elaborate rhyme scheme images the importance to Thomas of "craft," while the poem's images render the power and beauty of his "art."

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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the chairman of the candidate's supervisory committee and has been approved by all members of that committee. It was submitted to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate Council, and was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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